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Who?

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"Here, quick, I hear footsteps on the stairs!"

From the drawing by John Cassel

Chapter XX)

Who?

By

Elizabeth Kent

Author of "The House Opposite," etc.

G. P. Putnam's Sons
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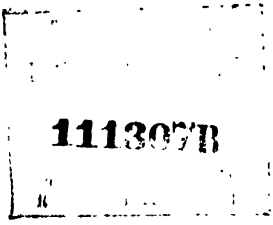
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Who?

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WHO?

CHAPTER I

THE WOMAN IN THE COMPARTMENT

It was six o'clock on a raw October morning, and the cross Channel boat had just deposited its cargo of pale and dishevelled passengers at Newhaven. Cyril Crichton, having seen his servant place his bags in a first-class compartment, gazed gloomily at the scene before him.

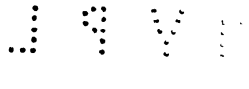
It was the first time in three years that he had set foot on his native shore and the occasion seemed invested with a certain solemnity.

"What a mess I have made of my life! Yet God knows I meant well!" He muttered in his heart. "If I had n't been such a good-natured ass, I should never have got into all this trouble. But I won't be made a fool of any

longer. I will consult Campbell as to what—" He paused. It suddenly occurred to him that he had forgotten to let the latter know of his impending arrival. "I will send him a wire," he decided.

The telegraph-office was farther off than he expected, and to Crichton's disgust, he found it shut. He had forgotten that in well-regulated England, even matters of life and death have to wait till the offices open at eight A.M.

He was still staring at the closed window, when he was startled by the guard's whistle, and the slamming of the carriage doors. Turning quickly, he ran back, trying to find his compartment, but it was too late; the train was already moving. Flinging off a porter's detaining hand, he jumped on to the foot-board and wrenched open the nearest door. The impetus flung him headlong into the lap of a lady,—the sole occupant of the carriage. To his horror and amazement, instead of listening to his apologies, she uttered a piercing shriek and fell forward into his arms. For a moment Crichton was too dazed to move. There he knelt, tightly clasping her limp form and wondering fearfully



what would happen next. At last he managed to pull himself together, and staggering to his feet, laid her gently on the seat near the window. Strangely enough, he had had no idea, so far, as to the appearance, or even the age, of the lady with whom fate had thrown him into such intimate contact: consequently he now looked at her with considerable curiosity. Her slight, graceful figure proclaimed her youth, but her face was completely concealed by a thick, black veil, which prevented him from so much as guessing the outline of her features. As she continued to show no sign of returning consciousness, Crichton looked helplessly around for some means of reviving her. More air was what she needed; so with much trepidation he decided to unfasten her veil. His fingers fumbled clumsily over their unaccustomed task, but finally the last knot was disentangled, the last pin extracted. The unknown proved to be even younger than he expected, and to possess beauty of the kind which admits of no discussion. At present, however, it was sadly marred by a red welt, probably the result of a fall, Crichton decided, which disfigured her left cheek. A minute before he had

been cursing his luck, which invariably landed him in strange adventures, but at the sight of her beauty, our hero suddenly ceased to find the situation annoying. His interest, however, increased his alarm. What if she were dead or dying? Heart attacks were not uncommon. Bending over her, he laid his hand on her heart, and as he did so, the long lashes lifted, and a pair of sapphire blue eyes looked straight into his. Before he had time to move, she threw out both hands and cried: "Oh, let me go!"

"Don't be alarmed. Notwithstanding my unceremonious entrance, I assure you, I am a perfectly respectable member of society. My name is Crichton."

The girl staggered to her feet. "Crichton?" she gasped.

He looked at her in surprise.

"Yes, Crichton. Do you know any member of my family by any chance? My cousin, Lord Wilmersley, has a place near here."

"No," she faltered, "I—I am quite a stranger in this part of the country."

He was sure she was lying, but what could be her object in doing so? And why had his name

caused her such alarm? What unpleasant connection could she possibly have with it? The only male members of his family who bore it, were, a curate, serving his probation in the East End of London, and a boy at Eton.

"That is a pity," he said. "I hoped we might find some mutual friends who would vouch for my inoffensiveness. I can't tell you how sorry I am to have given you such a fright. It was unpardonably stupid of me. The fact is, I am rather absent-minded, and I should have been left behind if I had not tumbled in on you as I did. Please forgive me."

"On the contrary, it is I who should apologise to you for having made such a fuss about nothing. You must have thought me quite mad." She laughed nervously.

"Madam," he replied, with mock solemnity, "I assure you I never for a moment doubted your sanity, and I am an expert in such matters."

"Are you really?" She shrank farther from him.

"Really what?" he inquired, considerably puzzled.

"A—a brain specialist? That is what they are called, is n't it?"

He laughed heartily.

"No, indeed. But you said——"

"Of course! How stupid of me!"

"Why should you know that I am a soldier?"

She blushed vividly. "You don't look like a civilian."

"At all events I hope I don't look like the keeper of an insane asylum."

"No, indeed. But you said——"

"Oh, as to being an expert. Was that it? I must plead guilty to having attempted a feeble joke, though as a matter of fact, it so happened that I do know something about lunatics."

"Are n't you dreadfully afraid of them?"

"On general principles, of course, I am afraid of nothing, but I fancy a full-grown lunatic, with a carving knife and a hankering for my blood, would have a different tale to tell."

"Oh, don't speak of them!" She covered her eyes with her hands.

"I beg your pardon."

"Why should you beg my pardon?" she asked looking at him suspiciously.

"I really don't know," he acknowledged.

"I know that I am behaving like a hysterical schoolgirl. What must you think of me! But, —but I am just recovering from an illness and am still very nervous, and the mere mention of lunatics always upsets me. I have the greatest horror of them."

"Poor child, she must have been through some terrible experience with one," thought Crichton.

"I trust you may never meet any," he said aloud.

"I don't intend to." She spoke with unexpected vehemence.

"Well, there is not much chance of your doing so. Certified lunatics find it pretty difficult to mingle in general society."

"I know—oh, I know—" Her voice sounded almost regretful.

What an extraordinary girl! Could it be—was it possible that she herself—but no, her behaviour was certainly strange and she seemed hysterical, but mad—no, and yet that would explain everything.

"I am sure it was the horrid crossing

which upset you—as much as anything else," he said.

"I did n't cross, I—" She stopped abruptly, and bit her lip.

It was quite obvious that for some reason or other, she had not wished him to know that she had got in at Newhaven. He knew that politeness demanded he should not pursue a subject which was evidently distasteful to her. But his curiosity overcame his scruples.

"Really? It is rather unusual to take this train unless one is coming from the continent."

"Yes. One has to start so frightfully early. I had to get up a little before five." That meant she must live in Newhaven, and not far from the station at that—but was it true? She had about her that indescribable something which only those possess whose social position has never been questioned. No, Newhaven did not seem the background for her. But then, had she not herself told him that she did not live there? She might have gone there on an errand of charity or— After all, what business was it of his? Why should he attempt to pry into her life? It was abominable.

She settled herself in a corner of the carriage, and he fancied that she wished to avoid further conversation. Serve him jolly well right, he thought.

During the rest of the journey his behaviour was almost ostentatiously discreet. If she feared that he was likely to take advantage of the situation, he was determined to show her that he had no intention of doing so. To avoid staring at her he kept his eyes fixed on the rapidly changing landscape; but they might have been suddenly transported to China without his observing the difference. In fact, he had not realised that they were nearing their destination, till he saw his companion readjust her veil. A few minutes later the train stopped at Hearne Hill.

Crichton put his head out of the window.

"There is something up," he said, a moment later turning to her. "There must be a criminal on board. There are a lot of policemen about, and they seem to be searching the train."

"Oh, what shall I do!" she cried, starting to her feet.

"What is the matter?"

"They will shut me up. Oh, save me—save me!"

For a moment he was too startled to speak.

Was it possible? This girl a criminal—a thief? He could n't believe it.

"But what have you done?"

"Nothing, nothing I assure you. Oh, believe me, it is all a mistake."

He looked at her again. Innocent or guilty, he would stand by her.

"They will be here directly," he said. "Have you enough self-control to remain perfectly calm and to back up any story I tell?"

"Yes."

"Sit down then, and appear to be talking to me."

"Tickets, please." The guard was at the door, and behind him stood a police inspector.

Crichton having given up his ticket, turned to the girl and said: "You have your ticket, Amy."

She handed it over.

"From Newhaven, I see." The inspector stepped forward:

"I must ask the lady to lift 'er veil, please."

"What do you mean, my man? Are you drunk?

"Steady, sir. Do you know this lady?"

"This lady happens to be my wife, so you will kindly explain your extraordinary behaviour."

The inspector looked a little nonplussed.

"Sorry to hinconvenience you, sir, but we 'ave orders to search this train for a young lady who got in at Newhaven. Now this is the only lady on board whose ticket was not taken in Paris. So you see we have got to make sure that this is not the person we want."

"But, man alive, I tell you this lady is my wife."

"So you say, sir, but you can't prove it, can you, now? You 're registered through from Paris, and this lady gets in at Newhaven. How do you explain that?"

"Of course, one does n't travel about with one's marriage certificate—but as it happens, I can prove that this lady is my wife. Here is my passport; kindly examine it. Mrs. Crichton returned to England several months ago, and went down to Newhaven last night so as to be able to meet me this morning. As to lifting her

veil, of course she has no objection to doing so. I thought it idle curiosity on your part, but as it is a question of duty, that alters the case completely."

"Thank you, sir." The inspector opened the passport and read aloud. "Cyril Crichton—Lieutenant in the—Rifles, age 27 years, height 6 ft., 1 inch, weight 12 stone. Hair—fair; complexion—fair, inclined to be ruddy. Eyes—blue. Nose—straight, rather short. Mouth—large. Distinguishing marks: cleft in chin." And as he read each item, he paused to compare the written description with the original.

"Well, that 's all right," he said. "And now for the lady's. Will you kindly lift your veil, m'm?"

"To Crichton's surprise, the girl did so quite calmly, and her face, although deadly pale, was perfectly composed.

The inspector read: "Amy Crichton, wife of Cyril Crichton, age—26 years—H'm that seems a bit old for the lady."

The girl blushed vividly, but to Crichton's infinite relief she smiled gaily, and with a slight bow to the inspector said: "You flatter me."

Crichton breathed more freely. Her manner had done more to relieve the situation than anything he had said. The inspector continued in quite a different tone.

"'Height—5 ft., 4 inches.' You look a bit shorter than that."

"Measure me, if you doubt it." She challenged him.

"Oh, well, I am sure it is all right. 'Weight —9 stone, 4 lbs.'" He paused again, but this time made no comment, although Crichton felt sure that his companion weighed at least ten pounds less than the amount mentioned. "Hair —black. Complexion—fair. Eyes—blue. Nose —straight. Mouth—small. Oval chin. Distinguishing marks—none. All right, m'm! Sorry to 'ave disturbed you, but you understand we 'ave got to be very careful. We 'd never 'ear the last of it if we let the party we 're after slip through our fingers."

"What is the woman you are looking for accused of?" asked Crichton.

"Murder," replied the inspector, as he closed the door.

CHAPTER II

"MRS. PETER THOMPKINS"

"MURDER!"

Crichton looked at the girl. Her eyes were closed and she lay back breathing heavily. He did not know if she had even heard the accusation. Luckily the train was already moving. In a few minutes, however, they would be in London and then what should he do with her? Now that he had declared her to be his wife, it would arouse the suspicion of the police if he parted from her at the station. Besides, he could not desert the poor child in her terrible predicament. For she was innocent, he was sure of that. But here he was wasting precious time worrying about the future, when he ought to be doing something to revive her. It was simply imperative that she should be able to leave the train without exciting remark, as, once

outside the station, the immediate danger would be over. His ministrations, however, were quite ineffectual, and, to his dismay, the train came to a standstill before she showed a sign of returning consciousness.

A porter opened the door.

"Bring a glass of water; the lady has fainted," he ordered. The porter returned in a few minutes followed by the police inspector. Crichton's heart sank. He fancied the latter eyed them with reawakened suspicion. As he knelt by the girl's side, her head on his shoulder, his arms around her, he suddenly became aware that a number of people had collected near the door and were watching the scene with unconcealed interest. And among them stood Peter, his valet, staring at him with open-mouthed amazement.

Damn! He had completely forgotten him. If he did n't look out, the fellow would be sure to give the situation away.

"Peter," he called.

Peter elbowed his way through the crowd.

"Your mistress has fainted. Get my flask." Crichton spoke slowly and distinctly and looked

Peter commandingly in the eye. Would he understand? Would he hold his tongue? Crichton watched him breathlessly. For a moment Peter blinked at him uncomprehendingly. Then the surprise slowly faded from his face, leaving it as stolid as usual.

"Very well, sir," was all he said as he went off automatically to do his master's bidding. An order has a wonderfully steadying effect on a well-trained servant.

The brandy having been brought, Crichton tried to force a few drops of it between the girl's clenched teeth. After a few minutes, however, he had to abandon the attempt.

The situation was desperate.

The inspector stepped forward.

"Don't you think, sir, you ought to send for a doctor? The lady looks bad and she can't stay here, you know. The train has to be backed out in a few minutes. We'll carry her to the waiting-room if you wish, or come to think of it, had n't you better call an ambulance? Then you could take the lady home and the doctor who comes with them things would know what to do for her."

Crichton almost gasped with relief.

"An ambulance! The very thing. Get one immediately!"

The last passenger was just leaving the station when the ambulance clattered up.

The doctor, although hardly more than a boy, seemed to know his business, and after examining the girl and asking a few questions, he proceeded to administer various remedies, which he took out of a bag he carried.

"I am afraid this case is too serious for me," he said at last.

"What is the trouble?"

"Of course, I can't speak with any certainty, but from what you tell me, I think the lady is in for an attack of brain fever."

Crichton felt *his* brain reel.

"What shall I do?"

"We will take her home and in the meantime telephone to whatever doctor you wish to have called, so that he can see the patient as soon as possible."

"I have no house in town. I was going into lodgings but I can't take an invalid there."

"Of course not! What do you say to taking her at once to a nursing home?"

"Yes, that would be best. Which one would you recommend? I am ignorant of such matters."

"Well—Dr. Stuart-Smith has one not far from here. You know him by reputation, don't you?"

"Certainly. All right, take her there."

"I had better telephone and prepare them for our arrival. What is the lady's name, please?"

The inspector's eyes were upon him; Peter was at his elbow. Well—there was no help for it.

"Mrs. Cyril Crichton," he said.

The doctor returned in a few minutes.

"It is all right. They have got a room and Doctor Smith will be there almost as soon as we are."

Having lifted her into the ambulance, the doctor turned to Cyril and said: "I suppose you prefer to accompany Mrs. Crichton. You can get in, in front."

Crichton meekly obeyed.

"Take my things to the lodgings and wait for

me there, and by the way, be sure to telephone at once to Mr. Campbell and tell him I must see him immediately," he called to Peter as they drove off.

They had apparently got rid of the police—that was something at all events. His own position, however, caused him the gravest concern. It was not only compromising but supremely ridiculous. He must extricate himself from it at once. His only chance, he decided, lay in confiding the truth to Dr. Smith. Great physicians have necessarily an enormous knowledge of life and therefore he would be better able than any other man to understand the situation and advise him as to what should be done. At all events the etiquette of his calling would prevent a doctor from divulging a professional secret, even in the case of his failing to sympathise with his, Cyril's, knight-errantry. Crichton heaved a sigh of satisfaction. His troubles, he foresaw, would soon be over.

The ambulance stopped. The girl was carried into the house and taken possession of by an efficient-looking nurse, and Cyril was re-

quested to wait in the reception-room while she was being put to bed. Dr. Smith, he was told, would communicate with him as soon as he had examined the patient.

Crichton paced the room in feverish impatience. His doubts revived. What if the doctor should refuse to keep her? Again and again he rehearsed what he intended to say to him, but the oftener he did so, the more incredible did his story appear. It also occurred to him that a physician might not feel himself bound to secrecy when it was a question of concealing facts other than those relating to a patient's physical condition. What if the doctor should consider it his duty to inform the police of her whereabouts?

At last the door opened. Dr. Smith proved to be a short, grey-haired man with piercing, black eyes under beetling, black brows, large nose, and a long upper lip. Cyril's heart sank. The doctor did not look as if he would be likely to sympathise with his adventure.

"Mr. Crichton, I believe." The little man spoke quite fiercely and regarded our friend with evident disfavour.

Crichton was for a moment nonplussed. What had he done to be addressed in such a fashion?

"I hope you can give me good news of the patient?" he said, disregarding the other's manner.

"No," snapped out the doctor. "Mrs. Crichton is very seriously, not to say dangerously, ill."

What an extraordinary way of announcing a wife's illness to a supposed husband! Was every one mad to-day?

"I am awfully sorry—" began Crichton.

"Oh, you are, are you?" interrupted the doctor, and this time there could be no doubt he was intentionally insulting. "Will you then be kind enough to explain how your wife happens to be in the condition she is?"

"What condition?" faltered Cyril.

"Tut, man, don't pretend to be ignorant. Remember I am a doctor and can testify to the facts; yes, facts," he almost shouted.

Poor Crichton sat down abruptly. He really felt he could bear no more.

"For God's sake, doctor, tell me what is the matter with her. I swear I have n't the faintest idea."

His distress was so evidently genuine that the doctor relaxed a little and looked at him searchingly for a moment.

"Your wife has been recently flogged!"

"Flogged! How awful! But I can't believe it."

"Indeed!"

"Certainly not. You must be mistaken. The bruises may be the result of a fall."

"They are not," snapped the doctor.

"Flogged! here in England, in the twentieth century! But who could have done such a thing?"

"That is for you to explain, and I must warn you that unless your explanation is unexpectedly satisfactory, I shall at once notify the police."

Police! Crichton wiped beads of perspiration from his forehead.

"But, doctor, I know no more about it than you do."

"So you think that it will be sufficient for you to deny all knowledge as to how, where, and by whom a woman who is your wife—yes, sir—your wife, has been maltreated? Man, do you take me for a fool?"

What should he do? Was this the moment to tell him the truth? No, it would be useless. The doctor, believing him to be a brute, was not in a frame of mind to attach credence to his story. The truth was too improbable, a convincing lie could alone save the situation.

"My wife and I have not been living together lately," he stammered.

"Indeed!" The piercing eyes seemed to grow more piercing, the long upper lip to become longer.

"Yes," Crichton hesitated—it is so difficult to invent a plausible story on the spur of the moment. "In fact, I met her quite unexpectedly in Newhaven."

"In Newhaven?"

"Yes. I have just arrived from France," continued Crichton more fluently. An idea was shaping itself in his mind. "I was most astonished to meet my wife in England as I had been looking for her in Paris for the last week."

"I don't understand."

"My wife is unfortunately mentally unbalanced. For the last few months she has been

confined in an asylum." Crichton spoke with increasing assurance.

"Where was this asylum?"

"In France."

"Yes, but where? France is a big place."

"It is called Charleroi and is about thirty miles from Paris in the direction of Fontainebleau."

"Who is the director of this institution?"

"Dr. Leon Monet."

"And you suggest that it was there that she was ill-treated. Let me tell you——"

Cyril interrupted him.

"I suggest no such thing. My wife escaped from Charleroi over a week ago. We know she went to Paris, but there we lost all trace of her. Imagine my astonishment at finding her on the train this morning. How she got there, I can't think. She seemed very much agitated, but I attributed that to my presence. I have lately had a most unfortunate effect upon her. I did ask her how she got the bruise on her cheek, but she would n't tell me. I had no idea she was suffering. If I had been guilty of the condition she is in, is it likely that I should have brought

her to a man of your reputation and character? I think that alone proves my innocence."

The doctor stared at him fixedly for a few moments as if weighing the credibility of his explanation.

"You say that the physician under whose care your wife has been is called Monet?"

"Yes, Leon Monet."

The doctor left the room abruptly. When he returned, his bearing had completely changed.

"I have just verified your statement in a French medical directory and I must apologise to you for having jumped at conclusions in the way I did. Pray, forgive me——"

Crichton bowed rather distantly. He did n't feel over-kindly to the man who had forced him into such a quagmire of lies.

"Now as to—" Cyril hesitated a moment; he detested calling the girl by his name. "Now —as to—to—the patient. Have you any idea when she is likely to recover consciousness?"

"Not the faintest. Of course, what you tell me of her mental condition increases the seriousness of the case. With hysterical cases anything and everything is possible."

"But you do not fear the—worst."

"Certainly not. She is young. She will receive the best of care. I see no reason why she should not recover. Now if you would like to remain near her——"

There seemed a conspiracy to keep him forever at the girl's side, but this time he meant to break away even if he had to fight for it.

"I shall, of course, remain near her," Cyril interrupted hastily. "I have taken lodgings in Half Moon Street and shall stay there till she has completely recovered. As she has lately shown the most violent dislike of me, I think I had better not attempt to see her for the present. Don't you agree with me?"

"Certainly. I should not permit it under the circumstances."

"I shall call daily to find out how she is, and if there is any change in her condition, you will, of course, notify me at once." Crichton took out a card and scribbled his address on it. "This will always find me. And now I have a rather delicate request to make. Would you mind not letting any one know the identity of your patient? You see I have every hope that

she will eventually recover her reason and therefore I wish her malady to be kept a secret. I have told my friends that my wife is in the south of France undergoing a species of rest cure."

"I think you are very wise. I shall not mention her name to any one."

"But the nurses?"

"It is a rule of all nursing homes that a patient's name is never to be mentioned to an outsider. But if you wish to take extra precautions, you might give her another name while she is here and they need never know that it is not her own."

"Thank you. That is just what I should wish."

"What do you think Mrs. Crichton had better be called?"

Cyril thought a moment.

"Mrs. Peter Thompkins, and I will become Mr. Thompkins. Please address all communications to me under that name; otherwise the truth is sure to leak out."

"But how will you arrange to get your mail?"

"Peter Thompkins is my valet, so that is quite simple."

"Very well. Good-bye, Mr. Thompkins. I trust I shall soon have a better report to give you of Mrs. Thompkins."

A moment later Cyril was in a taxi speeding towards Mayfair, a free man—for the moment.

CHAPTER III

THE TRIBULATIONS OF A LIAR

WHILE Crichton was dressing he glanced from time to time at his valet. Peter had evidently been deeply shocked by the incident at the railway station, for the blunt profile, so persistently presented to him, was austerely remote as well as subtly disapproving. Cyril was fond of the old man, who had been his father's servant and had known him almost from his infancy. He felt that he owed him some explanation, particularly as he had without consulting him made use of his name.

But what should he say to him? Never before had he so fully realised the joy, the comfort, the dignity of truth. It was not a virtue he decided; it was a privilege. If he ever got out of the hole he was in, he meant to wallow in it for the future. That happy time seemed, however, still far distant.

Believing the girl to be innocent, he wanted as few people as possible to know the nature of the cloud which hung over her. Peter's loyalty, he knew, he could count on, that had been often and fully proved; but his discretion was another matter. Peter was no actor. If he had anything to conceal, even his silence became so portentous of mystery that it could not fail to arouse the curiosity of the most unsuspicious. No, he must think of some simple story which would satisfy Peter as to the propriety of his conduct and yet which, if it leaked out, would not be to the girl's discredit.

"You must have been surprised to hear me give my name to the young lady you saw at the station," he began tentatively.

"Yes, sir." Peter's expression relaxed.

"Her story is a very sad one." So much at any rate must be true, thought poor Cyril with some satisfaction.

"Yes, sir." Peter was waiting breathlessly for the sequel.

"I don't feel at liberty to repeat what she told me. You understand that, don't you?"

"Certainly, sir," agreed Peter, but his face fell.

"So all I can tell you is that she was escaping from a brute who horribly ill-treated her. Of course I offered to help her."

"Of course," echoed Peter.

"Unfortunately she was taken ill before she had told me her name or who the friends were with whom she was seeking refuge. What was I to do? If the police heard that a young girl had been found unconscious on the train, the fact would have been advertised far and wide so as to enable them to establish her identity, in which case the person from whom she was hiding would have taken possession of her, which he has a legal right to do—so she gave me to understand." Crichton paused quite out of breath. He was doing beautifully. Peter was swallowing his tale unquestionably—and really, you know, for an inexperienced liar that was a reasonably probable story. "So you see," he continued, "it was necessary for her to have a name and mine was the only one which would not provoke further inquiry."

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I should 'ave thought that Smith or Jones would 'ave done just as well."

"Certainly not. The authorities would have wanted further particulars and would at once have detected the fraud. No one will ever know that I lent an unfortunate woman for a few hours the protection of my name, and there is no one who has the right to object to my having done so—except the young lady herself."

"Yes, sir, quite so."

"On the other hand, on account of the position I am in at present, it is most important that I should do nothing which could by any possibility be misconstrued."

"Yes, sir, certainly, sir."

"And so I told the doctor that the young lady had better not be called by my name while she is at the home and so—and so—well—in fact—I gave her yours. I hope you don't mind?"

"My name?" gasped Peter in a horrified voice.

"Yes, you see you have n't got a wife, have you?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"So there could n't be any possible complications in your case."

"One never can tell, sir—a name 's a name and females are sometimes not over-particular."

"Don't be an ass! Why, you ought to feel proud to be able to be of use to a charming lady. Where 's your chivalry, Peter?"

"I don't know, sir, but I do 'ope she 's respectable," he answered miserably.

"Of course she is. Don't you know a lady when you see one?"

Peter shook his head tragically.

"I 'm sorry you feel like that about it," said Crichton. "It never occurred to me you would mind, and I have n't yet told you all. I not only gave the young lady your name but took it myself."

"Took my name!"

"Yes. At the nursing home I am known as Mr. Peter Thompkins. Pray that I don't disgrace you, Peter."

"Oh, sir, a false name! If you get found out, they 'll never believe you are hinnocent when you 've done a thing like that. Of course, a gentleman like you hought to know his own business best, but it do seem to me most awful risky."

"Well, it 's a risk that had to be taken. It was a choice of evils, I grant you. Hah! I

sniff breakfast; the bacon and eggs of my country await me. I am famishing, and I say, Peter, do try to take a more cheerful view of this business."

"I 'll try, sir."

Crichton was still at breakfast when a short, red-haired young man fairly burst into the room.

"Guy Campbell!" exclaimed Cyril joyfully.

"Hullo, old chap, glad to see you," cried the newcomer, pounding Cyril affectionately on the back. "How goes it? I say, your telephone message gave me quite a turn. What 's up? Have you got into a scrape? You look as calm as possible."

"If I look calm, my looks belie me. I assure you I never felt less calm in my life."

"What on earth is the matter?"

"You won't have some breakfast?"

"Breakfast at half-past eleven! No thank you."

"Well, then, take a cigarette, pull up that chair to the fire, and listen—and don't play the fool; this is serious."

"Fire away."

"I want your legal advice, Guy, though I

suppose you 'll tell me I need a solicitor, not a barrister. I wish to get a divorce."

"A divorce? Why, Cyril, I am awfully sorry. I had heard that your marriage had n't turned out any too well, but I had no idea it was as bad as that. You have proof, I suppose."

"Ample."

"Tell me the particulars. I never have heard anything against your wife's character."

"You mean that you have never heard that she was unfaithful to me. Bah, it makes me sick the way people talk, as if infidelity were the only vice that damned a woman's character. Guy, her character was rotten through and through. Her infidelity was simply a minor, though culminating, expression of it."

"But how did you come to marry such a person?"

"You know she was the Chalmerses' governess?"

"Yes."

"I had been spending a few weeks with them. Jack, the oldest son, was a friend of mine and she was the daughter of a brother officer of old Chalmers's who had died in India, and conse-

quently her position in the household was different from that of an ordinary governess. I soon got quite friendly with Amy and her two charges, and we used to rag about together a good deal. I liked her, but upon my honour I had n't a thought of making love to her. Then one day there was an awful row. They accused her of carrying on a clandestine love affair with Freddy, the second son, and with drinking on the sly. They had found empty bottles hidden in her bedroom. She posed as injured innocence —the victim of a vile plot to get her out of the house—had no money, no friends, no hope of another situation. I was young; she was pretty. I was dreadfully sorry for her and so—well, I married her. As the regiment had just been ordered to South Africa, we went there immediately. We had not been married a year, however, when I discovered that she was a confirmed drunkard. I think only the fear of losing her position had kept her within certain bounds. That necessity removed, she seemed unable to put any restraint on herself. I doubt if she even tried to do so."

"Poor Cyril!"

"Later on I found out that she was taking drugs as well as stimulants. She would drink herself into a frenzy and then stupefy herself with opiates. But it is not only weakness I am accusing her of. She was inherently deceitful and cruel—ah, what is the use of talking about it! I have been through Hell."

"You have n't been living together lately, have you?"

"Well, you see, she was disgracing not only herself but the regiment, and so it became a question of either leaving the army or getting her to live somewhere else. So I brought her back to Europe, took a small villa near Pau, and engaged an efficient nurse-companion to look after her. I spent my leave with her, but that was all. Last spring, however, she got so bad that her companion cabled for me. For a few weeks she was desperately ill, and when she partially recovered, the doctor persuaded me to send her to a sanitarium for treatment. Charleroi was recommended to me. It was chiefly celebrated as a lunatic asylum, but it has an annex where dipsomaniacs and drug fiends are cared for. At first, the doctor's reports were very dis-

couraging, but lately her improvement is said to have been quite astonishing, so much so that it was decided that I should take her away for a little trip. I was on my way to Charleroi, when the news reached me that Amy had escaped. We soon discovered that she had fled with a M. de Brissac, who had been discharged as cured the day before my wife's disappearance. We traced them to within a few miles of Paris, but there lost track of them. I have, however, engaged a detective to furnish me with further particulars. I fancy the Frenchman is keeping out of the way for fear I shall kill him. Bah! Why, I pity him, that is all! He 'll soon find out what that woman is like. He has given me freedom! Oh, you can't realise what that means to me. I only wish my father were alive to know that I have this chance of beginning life over again."

"I was so sorry to hear of his death. He was always so kind to us boys when we stayed at Lingwood. I wrote you when I heard the sad news, but you never answered any of my letters."

"I know, old chap, but you must forgive me. I have been too miserable—too ashamed. I only wanted to creep away and to be forgotten."

"Your father died in Paris, did n't he?"

"Yes, luckily I was with him. It was just after I had taken Amy to Charleroi. He was a broken-hearted man. He never got over the mess I had made of my life and Wilmersley's marriage was the last straw. He brooded over it continually."

"Why had your father been so sure that Lord Wilmersley would never marry? He was an old bachelor, but not so very old after all. He can't be more than fifty now."

"Well, you see, Wilmersley has a bee in his bonnet. His mother was a Spanish ballet dancer whom my uncle married when he was a mere boy. She was a dreadful old creature. I remember her distinctly, a great, fat woman with a big, white face and enormous, glassy, black eyes. I was awfully afraid of her. She died when Wilmersley was about twenty and my uncle followed her a few months later. His funeral was hardly over when my cousin left Geralton and nothing definite was heard of him for almost twenty-five years. He was supposed to be travelling in the far East, and from time to time some pretty queer rumours drifted back about him.

Whether they were true or not, I have never known. One day he returned to Geralton as unexpectedly as he had left it. He sent for me at once. He has immense family pride—the ballet dancer, I fancy, rankles—and having decided for some reason or other not to marry, he wished his heir to cut a dash. He offered me an allowance of £4000 a year, told me to marry as soon as possible, and sent me home."

"Well, that was pretty decent of him. You don't seem very grateful."

"I can't bear him. He 's a most repulsive-looking chap, a thorough Spaniard, with no trace of his father's blood that I can see. And as I married soon afterwards and my marriage was not to his liking, he stopped my allowance and swore I should never succeed him if he could help it. So you see I have n't much reason to be grateful to him."

"Beastly shame! He married Miss Mannering, Lady Upton's granddaughter, did n't he?"

"Yes."

"She is a little queer, I believe."

"Really? I did n't know that. I have never seen her, but I hear she is very pretty. Well,

I 'm sorry for her, brought up by that old curmudgeon of a grandmother and married out of the schoolroom to Wilmersley. She has never had much of a chance, has she?"

"There are no children as yet?"

"No."

"So that now that your father is dead, you are the immediate heir."

The door was flung open and Peter rushed into the room brandishing a paper.

"Oh, sir, it 's come at last! I always felt it would!" He stuttered with excitement.

"What on earth is the matter with you?"

"I beg pardon, sir, but I am that hovercome! I heard them crying 'hextras,' so I went out and gets one—just casual-like. Little did I think what would be in it—and there it was."

"There was what?" Both men spoke at once, leaning eagerly forward.

"That Lord Wilmersley is dead; and so, my lord, I wish you much joy and a long life."

"This is very sudden," gasped Crichton. "I had n't heard he was ill. What did he die of?"

"'E was murdered, my lord."

CHAPTER IV

ON THE SCENE OF THE TRAGEDY

"WHEN, how, who did it?" cried Cyril incoherently. "Give me the paper."

"Murder of Lord Wilmersley—disappearance of Lady Wilmersley," he read. "Disappearance of Lady Wilmersley," he repeated, as the paper fell from his limp hand.

"Here, get your master some whiskey; th shock has been too much for him," said Camp bell. "Mysterious disappearance of Lady Wilmersley," murmured Crichton, staring blankly in front of him.

"Here, drink this, old man; you 'll be all right in a moment," said Campbell, pressing a glass into his hand.

Cyril emptied it automatically.

"The deuce take it!" he cried, covering his face with his hands.

"Shall I read you the particulars?" Campbell asked, taking the paper. Cyril nodded assent.

"'The body of Lord Wilmersley was found at seven o'clock this morning floating in the swimming bath at Geralton. It was at first thought that death had been caused by drowning, but on examination, a bullet wound was discovered over the heart. Search for the pistol with which the crime was committed has so far proved fruitless. The corpse was dressed in a long, Eastern garment frequently worn by the deceased. Lady Wilmersley's bedroom, which adjoins the swimming bath, was empty. The bed had not been slept in. A hurried search of the castle and grounds was at once made, but no trace of her ladyship has been discovered. It is feared that she also has been murdered and her body thrown into the lake, which is only a short distance from the castle. None of her wearing apparel is missing, even the dress and slippers she wore on the previous evening were found in a corner of her room. Robbery was probably the motive of the crime, as a small safe, which stands next to Lady Wilmersley's bed and contained her

jewels, has been rifled. Whoever did this must, however, have known the combination, as the lock has not been tampered with. This adds to the mystery of the case. Lady Wilmersley is said to be mentally unbalanced. Arthur Edward Crichton, 9th Baron Wilmersley, was born—' here follows a history of your family, Cyril, you don't want to hear that. Well, what do you think of it?" asked Campbell.

"It's too horrible! I can't think," said Crichton.

"I don't believe Lady Wilmersley was murdered," said Campbell. "Why should a murderer have troubled to remove one body and not the other? Mark my words, it was his wife who killed Wilmersley and opened the safe."

"I don't believe it! I won't believe it!" cried Cyril. "Besides, how could she have got away without a dress or hat? Remember they make a point of the fact that none of her clothes are missing."

"In the first place, you can't believe everything you read in a newspaper; but even granting the correctness of that statement, what was there to prevent her having borrowed a dress

from one of her maids? She must have had one, you know."

"No—no! It can't be, I tell you; I—" Cyril stopped abruptly.

"What 's the matter with you? You look as guilty as though you had killed him yourself. I can't for the life of me see why you take the thing so terribly to heart. You did n't like your cousin and from what you yourself tell me, I fancy he is no great loss to any one, and you don't know his wife—widow, I mean."

"It is such a shock," stammered Cyril.

"Of course it 's a shock, but you ought to think of your new duties. You will have to go to Geralton at once?"

"Yes, I suppose it will be expected of me," Cyril assented gloomily. "Peter, pack my things and find out when the next train leaves."

"Very well, my lord."

"And Guy, you will come with me, won't you? I really can't face this business alone. Besides, your legal knowledge may come in useful."

"I am awfully sorry, but I really can't come to-day. I 've got to be in court this afternoon;

but I 'll come as soon as I can, if you really want me."

"Do!"

"Of course I want to be of use if I can, but a detective is really what you need."

"A detective?" gasped Cyril.

"Well, why not? Don't look as if I had suggested your hiring a camel!"

"Yes, of course not—I mean a detective is—would be—in fact—very useful," stammered Cyril. Why could n't Guy mind his own business?

"Why not get one and take him down with you?" persisted Campbell.

"Oh, no!" Cyril hurriedly objected, "I don't think I had better do that. They may have one already. Should n't like to begin by hurting local feeling and—and all that, you know."

"Rot!"

"At any rate, I 'm not going to engage any one till I 've looked into the matter myself," said Cyril. "If I find I need a man, I 'll wire."

Campbell, grumbling about unnecessary delay, let the matter drop.

Two hours later Cyril was speeding towards Newhaven.

Huddled in a corner of the railway carriage, he gave himself up to the gloomiest reflections. Was ever any one pursued by such persistent ill-luck? It seemed too hard that just as he began to see an end to his matrimonial troubles, he should have tumbled headlong into this terrible predicament. From the moment he heard of Lady Wilmersley's disappearance he had never had the shadow of a doubt but that it was she he had rescued that morning from the police. What was he going to do, now that he knew her identity? He must decide on a course of action at once. Wash his hands of her? No-o. He felt he could n't do that—at least, not yet. But unless he immediately and voluntarily confessed the truth, who would believe him if it ever came to light? If it were discovered that he, the heir, had helped his cousin's murderess to escape—had posed as her husband, would any one, would any jury believe that chance alone had thrown them together? He might prove an alibi, but that would only save his life—not his honour. He would always

be suspected of having instigated, if not actually committed, the murder.

If, however, by some miracle the truth did not leak out, what then? It would mean that from this day forward he would live in constant fear of detection. The very fact of her secret existence must necessarily poison his whole life. Lies, lies, lies would be his future portion. Was he willing to assume such a burden? Was it his duty to take upon himself the charge of a woman who was after all but a homicidal maniac? But was she a maniac? Again and again he went over each incident of their meeting, weighed her every word and action, and again he found it impossible to believe that her mind was unbalanced. Yet if she was not insane, what excuse could he find to explain her crime? Provocation? Yes, she had had that. She had been beaten, flogged. But even so, to kill! He had once been present when a murderer was sentenced: "To hang by the neck until you are dead," the words rang in his ears. That small white neck—no—never. Suddenly he realised that his path was irrevocably chosen. As long as she needed him, he would protect her

to the uttermost of his ability. Even if his efforts proved futile, even if he ruined his life without saving hers, he felt he would never regret his decision.

"Newhaven."

It seemed centuries since he had left it that morning. Hiring a fly, he drove out to Geralton, a distance of nine miles. There the door was opened by the same butler who had admitted him five years previously. "It's Mr. Cyril!" he cried, falling back a step. "Why, sir, they all told us as 'ow you were in South Africa. But I bid you welcome, sir."

"Thank you. I am glad to see you again."

"Thank you, sir,—my lord, I mean, and please forgive your being received like this—but every one is so upset, there's no doing nothing with nobody. If you will step in 'ere, I'll call Mrs. Eversley, the 'ousekeeper."

"Is Mrs. Eversley still here? I remember her perfectly. She used to stuff me with doughnuts when I came here as a boy. Tell her I will see her presently."

"Very good, my lord."

"Now I want to hear all the particulars of

the tragedy. The newspaper account was very meagre."

"Quite so, my lord," assented the butler.

"Lady Wilmersley has not been found?" asked Cyril.

"No, my lord. We 've searched for her ladyship 'igh and low. Not a trace of her. And now every one says as 'ow she did it. But I 'll never believe it—never. A gentle little lady, she was, and so easily frightened! Why, if my lord so much as looked at her sometimes, she 'd fall a trembling, and 'e always so kind and devoted to 'er. 'E just doted on 'er, 'e did. I never saw nothing like it."

"If you don't believe her ladyship guilty, is there any one else you do suspect?"

"No, my lord, I can't say as I do." He spoke regretfully. "It was a burglar, I believe. I think the detective——"

"What detective?" interrupted Cyril.

"His name is Judson; 'e comes from London and they say as 'e can find a murderer just by looking at the chair 'e sat in."

"Who sent for him? The police?"

"No, it was Mr. Twombley of Crofton. He

said we owed it to 'er ladyship to hemploy the best talent."

"Where is the detective now?"

"'E 's in the long drawing-room with Mr. Twombley."

"Has the inquest been held?"

"No, the corpse won't be sat on till to-morrow morning."

"Show me the way to the drawing-room. I don't quite remember it."

The butler preceded him across the hall and throwing open a door announced in a loud voice:

"Lord Wilmersley."

The effect was electrical. Four men who had been deep in conversation turned and stared open-mouthed at Cyril, and one of them, a short fat man in clerical dress, dropped his teacup in his agitation.

"Who?" bellowed a tall, florid old gentleman.

The butler, secretly delighted at having produced such a sensation, closed the door discreetly after him.

"I don't wonder you are surprised to see me. You thought I was with my regiment."

"So you 're the little shaver I knew as a boy?

Well, you 've grown a bit since then. Hah, hah." Then, recollecting the solemnity of the occasion, he subdued his voice. "I 'm Twombley, friend of your father's, you know, and this is Mr. James, your vicar, and this is Mr. Tinker, the coroner, and this is Judson, celebrated detective, you know. I sent for him. Hope you approve? Terrible business, what?"

"It has been a great shock to me, and I am very glad to have Judson's assistance," replied Cyril, casting a searching and apprehensive glance at the detective.

He was a small, clean-shaven man with short, grey hair, grey eyebrows, grey complexion, dressed in a grey tweed suit. His features were peculiarly indefinite. His half-closed eyes, lying in the shadow of the overhanging brows, were fringed with light eyelashes and gave no accent to his expressionless face.

At all events, thought Cyril, he does n't look very alarming, but then, you never can tell.

"I must condole with you on the unexpected loss of a relative, who was in every way an honour to his name and his position," said the vicar, holding out a podgy hand.

Cyril was so taken aback at this unexpected tribute to his cousin's memory that he was only able to murmur a discreet "Thank you."

"The late Lord Wilmersley," said the coroner, "was a most public-spirited man and is a loss to the county."

"Quite so, quite so," assented Mr. Twombley. "Gave a good bit to the hunt, though he never hunted. Pretty decent of him, you know. You hunt, of course?"

"I have n't done much of it lately, but I shall certainly do so in future."

"Your cousin," interrupted the vicar, "was a man of deep religious convictions. His long stay in heathen lands had only strengthened his devotion to the true faith. His pew was never empty and he subscribed liberally to many charities."

By Jove, thought poor Cyril, his cousin had evidently been a paragon. It seemed incredible.

"I see it will be difficult to fill his place," he said aloud. "But I will do my best."

Twombley clapped him heartily on the back. "Oh, you 'll do all right, my boy, and then, you know, you 'll open the castle. The place has

been like a prison since Wilmersley's marriage."

"No one regretted that as much as Lord Wilmersley," said the vicar. "He often spoke to me about it. But he had the choice between placing Lady Wilmersley in an institution or turning the castle into an asylum. He chose the latter alternative, although it was a great sacrifice. I have rarely known so agreeable a man or one so suited to shine in any company. It was unpardonable of Lady Upton to have allowed him to marry without warning him of her granddaughter's condition. But he never had a word of blame for her."

"It was certainly a pity he did not have Lady Wilmersley put under proper restraint. If he had only done so, he would be alive now," said the coroner.

"So you believe that she murdered his lordship?"

"Undoubtedly. Who else could have done it? Who else had a motive for doing it. My theory is that her ladyship wanted to escape, that his lordship tried to prevent her, and so she shot him. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Judson?"

"It is impossible for me to express an opinion

at present. I have not had time to collect enough data," replied the detective pompously.

"He puts on such a lot of side, I believe he 's an ass," thought Cyril, heaving a sigh of relief. "But what about the missing jewels?" he said aloud. "Their disappearance certainly provides a motive for the crime?"

"Yes, but only Lord and Lady Wilmersley knew the combination of the safe."

"Who says so?"

"All the servants are agreed as to that. Besides, a burglar would hardly have overlooked the drawers of Lord Wilmersley's desk, which contained about £300 in notes."

"The thief may not have got as far as the library. Lady Wilmersley occupied the blue room, I suppose."

"Not at all. At the time of his marriage Lord Wilmersley ordered a suite of rooms on the ground floor prepared for his bride's reception," replied the vicar.

"And this swimming-bath? Where is that? There was none when I was here as a child."

"No, it was built for Lady Wilmersley and adjoins her private apartments," said the vicar.

"But all these rooms are on the ground floor. It must be an easy matter to enter them. Consequently——"

"Easy!" interrupted Twombley; "not a bit of it! But come and see for yourself."

Crossing the hall they paused at a door. "Now this door and that one next to it, which is the door of Lady Wilmersley's bedroom," said the coroner, "are the only ones in this wing which communicate with the rest of the castle, and both were usually kept locked, not only at night, but during the daytime. You will please notice, my lord," continued the coroner, as they entered the library, "that both doors are fitted with an ingenious device, by means of which they can be bolted and unbolted from several seats in this room and from the divans in the swimming-bath. Only in the early morning were the housemaids admitted to these rooms; after that no one but Mustapha, Lord Wilmersley's Turkish valet, ever crossed the threshold, unless with his lordship's express permission."

Twombley hurried him through the library.

"You can look this room over later; I want you first to see the swimming-bath."

Cyril found himself in an immense and lofty hall, constructed entirely of white marble and lighted by innumerable jewelled lamps, whose multi-coloured lights were reflected in the transparent waters of a pool, from the middle of which rose and splashed a fountain. Divans covered with soft cushions and several small tables laden with pipes, *houkahs,* cigarettes, etc., were placed at intervals around the sides of the bath. On one of the tables, Cyril noticed that two coffee-cups were still standing and by the side of a divan lay a long Turkish pipe. The floor was strewn with rare skins. A profusion of tropical plants imparted a heavy perfume to the air, which was warm and moist. Cyril blinked his eyes; he felt as if he had suddenly been transported to the palace of Aladdin.

"Rum place, what?" said Twombley, looking about him with evident disfavour. "To be shut in here for three years would be enough to drive any one crazy, I say."

"You will notice," said the coroner, "that the only entrance to the bath is through the library or her ladyship's bedroom. No one could have

let himself down through the skylight, as it is protected by iron bars."

"I see."

"It was here and in the library that Lord Wilmersley spent his time, and it was here in the right-hand corner of the bath that his body was discovered this morning by one of the housemaids. The spot, as you see, is exactly opposite her ladyship's door and that door was found open, just as it stands at present. Now the housemaids swear that they always found it closed and it is their belief that his lordship used to lock her ladyship in her rooms before retiring to his own quarters for the night. At all events they were never allowed to see her ladyship or enter her apartments unless his lordship or her ladyship's maid was also present."

"At about what time is Lord Wilmersley supposed to have been killed?" asked Cyril after a slight pause.

"Judging from the condition of the body, the doctor thinks that the murder was committed between eleven and twelve P.M.," replied the coroner; "and whoever fired the shot must have stood five or six feet from Lord Wilmersley; in

all probability, therefore, in the doorway of the bedroom. This is the room. Nothing has been touched, and you see that neither here nor in the swimming-bath are there signs of a struggle."

"The door leading into the hall was found locked?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then how did the house-man enter?"

"By means of a pass-key."

"Where does that other door lead to?" asked Cyril, pointing to a door to his left.

"Into the sitting-room," replied the coroner, throwing it open. "It was here, I am told, that Lady Wilmersley usually spent the morning."

It was a large, pleasant room panelled in white. A few faded pastels of by-gone beauties ornamented the walls. A gilt cage in which slumbered a canary hung in one of the windows. Cyril looked eagerly about him for some traces of its late occupant's personality; but except for a piece of unfinished needlework, lying on a small table near the fireplace, there was nothing to betray the owner's taste or occupations.

"And there is no way out of this room except through the bedroom?"

"None."

"No secret door?"

"No, my lord. Mr. Judson thought of that and has tapped the walls."

"But the windows?"

"These windows as well as those in the bedroom are fitted with heavy iron bars. Look," he said.

"Who was the last person known to have seen Lord Wilmersley alive?"

"Mustapha. He carried coffee into the swimming-bath at a quarter past nine, as was his daily custom."

"And he noticed nothing unusual?"

"Nothing. And he swears that in passing out through the library he heard the bolt click behind him."

"What sort of a person is Mustapha?"

"Lord Wilmersley brought him back with him when he returned from the East. He had the greatest confidence in him," said the vicar.

"Do you know what his fellow-servants think of him," inquired Cyril, addressing the coroner.

"He kept very much to himself. I fancy he

is not a favourite, but no one has actually said anything against him."

"Insular prejudice!" cried the vicar. "How few of us are able to overcome our inborn British suspicion of the foreigner!"

"Now will you examine the library?" asked the coroner. "See, here is his lordship's desk. There are the drawers in which the £300 were found, and yet any one could have picked that lock."

"Where does that door lead to?"

"Into Lord Wilmersley's bedroom, the window of which is also provided with iron bars."

"And that room has no exit but this?"

"None, my lord. If the murderer came from outside, he must have got in through one of these windows, which are the only ones in this wing which have no protection, and this one was found ajar—but it may have been used only as an exit, not as an entrance."

Cyril looked out. Even a woman would have no difficulty in jumping to the ground.

"But it could n't have been a burglar," said the vicar, "for what object could a thief have for destroying a portrait?"

"Destroying what portrait?" inquired Cyril.

"Oh, did n't you know that her ladyship's portrait was found cut into shreds?" said the coroner.

"And a pair of Lady Wilmersley's scissors lay on the floor in front of it," added the vicar.

"Let me see it," cried Cyril.

Going to a corner of the room the vicar pulled aside a velvet curtain behind which hung the wreck of a picture. The canvas was slashed from top to bottom. No trace of the face was left; only a small piece of fair hair was still distinguishable.

Cyril grasped Twombley's arm.

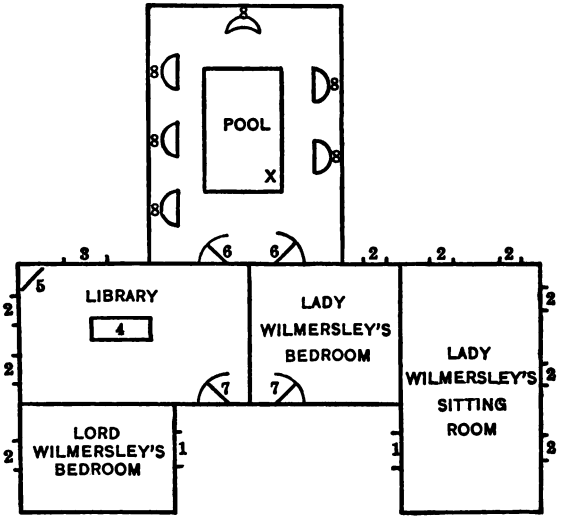
Fair! And his mysterious *protégée* was dark!

"What—what was the colour of Lady Wilmersley's hair?" He almost stuttered with excitement.

"A very pale yellow," replied the coroner.

"Why do you ask?" inquired the detective.

For the convenience of my readers I give a diagram of Lord and Lady Wilmersley's apartments.



X. Spot where Lord Wilmersley's body was found.
1. Doors locked and barred.
2. Windows all barred.
3. Window without bars found open.
4. Library table.
5. Lady Wilmersley's portrait.
6. Doors leading to swimming-pool.
7. Doors leading from hall.
8. Divans.

CHAPTER V

THE DETECTIVE DETECTS

"A VERY pale yellow!" Cyril was dumbfounded.

Every fact, every inference had seemed to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that his *protégée* and Lady Wilmersley were one and the same person. Was it possible that she could have worn a wig? No, for he remembered that in lifting her veil, he had inadvertently pulled her hair a little and had admired the way it grew on her temples.

"Why does the colour of her ladyship's hair interest you, my lord?" again inquired the detective.

Cyril blushed with confusion as he realised that all three men were watching him with evident astonishment. What a fool he was not to have been able to conceal his surprise! What

answer could he give them? However, as it was not his cousin's murderess he was hiding, he felt he had nothing to fear from the detective, so ignoring him he turned to Mr. Twombley and said with a forced laugh:

"I must be losing my mind, for I distinctly remember hearing a friend of mine rave about Lady Wilmersley's dark beauty." Rather a fishy explanation, thought poor Cyril; but really his powers of invention were exhausted. Would it satisfy them?

He glanced sharply at the detective. The latter was no longer looking at him, but was contemplating his watch-chain with absorbed attention.

"Hah, hah! Rather a joke, what?" laughed Twombley. "Never had seen her, I suppose; no one ever did, you know, except out driving."

"It was either a silly joke or my memory is in a bad shape," said Cyril. "Luckily it is a matter of no consequence. What is of vital importance, however," he continued, turning to the detective, "is that her ladyship should be secured immediately. No one is safe while she is still at large."

"It is unfortunate," replied the detective, "that no photograph of her ladyship can be found, but we have telegraphed her description all over the country."

"What is her description, by the way?"

"Here it is, my lord," said Judson, handing Cyril a printed sheet.

"Height, 5 feet 3; weight, about 9 stone 2; hair, very fair, inclined to be wavy; nose, straight; mouth, small; eyes, blue; face, oval," read Cyril. "Well, I suppose that will have to do, but of course that description would fit half the women in England."

"That 's the trouble, my lord."

"Mr. Twombley, when you said just now that no one knew her, did you mean that literally?"

"Nobody in the county did; I 'm sure of that."

"And you, Mr. James? Is it possible that even you never saw her?"

"I have never spoken to her."

"Then so far as you know, the only person outside the castle she could communicate with was the doctor. What sort of a man is he?"

"What doctor are you speaking of?" inquired the vicar.

"Why, the doctor who had charge of her case, of course," replied Cyril impatiently.

"I never heard of her having a doctor."

"Do you mean to say that Wilmersley kept her in confinement without orders from a physician?"

"No, I suppose not. Of course not. There must have been some one," faltered the vicar a trifle abashed.

"You never, however, inquired by what authority he kept his wife shut up?"

"I never insulted Lord Wilmersley by questioning the wisdom of his conduct or the integrity of his motives, and I repeat that there was undoubtedly some physician in attendance on Lady Wilmersley, only I do not happen to know who he is."

"Well, I must clear this matter up at once. Please ring the bell, Judson."

A minute later the butler appeared.

"Who was her ladyship's physician?" demanded Cyril.

"My lady never 'ad one; leastways not till yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

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"Yes, my lord, yesterday afternoon two gentlemen drove up in a fly and one of them says 'is name is Dr. Brown and that 'e was expected, and 'is lordship said as how I was to show them in here, and so I did."

"You think they came to see her ladyship?"

"Yes, my lord, and at dinner her ladyship seemed very much upset. She did n't eat a morsel, though 'is lordship urged 'er ever so."

"But why should a doctor's visit upset her ladyship?"

The butler pursed his lips and looked mysterious. "I can't say, my lord."

"Nonsense, you 've some idea in your head. Out with it!"

"Well, my lord, me and Charles, we thought as she was afraid they were going to lock 'er up."

Cyril started slightly.

"Ah! If they had done so long ago!" exclaimed the vicar, clasping his hands.

"But, sir, her ladyship was n't crazy! They all say so, but it is n't true. Me and Charles 'ave watched 'er at table day in and day out and we 're willing to swear that she is n't any more crazy than—than me! Please excuse the

liberty, but I never thought 'er ladyship was treated right, I never did."

"Why, you told me yourself that his lordship was devoted to her."

"So 'e was, my lord, so 'e was." The man shuffled uneasily.

"If her ladyship is not insane, why do you think his lordship kept her a prisoner here?"

"Well, my lord, some people 'ave thought that it was jealousy as made him do it."

"That," exclaimed the vicar, "is a vile calumny, which I have done my best to refute."

"So jealousy was the motive generally ascribed to my cousin's treatment of his wife?"

"Not generally, far from it; but I regret to say that there are people who professed to believe it."

"Did her ladyship have a nurse?" asked Cyril, addressing the butler.

"No, my lord, only a maid."

"Mrs. Valdriguez is a very respectable person, my lord."

"Mrs. What?" demanded Cyril.

"Mrs. Valdriguez."

"What a queer name."

"Perhaps, my lord, I don't pronounce it just right. Mrs. Valdriguez is Spanish."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, my lord, she was here first in the time of Lord Wilmersley's mother, and 'is lordship brought 'er back again when he returned from 'is 'oneymoon. Lady Wilmersley never left these rooms without 'aving either 'is lordship, Mustapha, or Valdriguez with 'er."

"Very good, Douglas, you can go now."

"A pretty state of things!" cried Cyril when the door closed behind the butler. "Here in civilised England a poor young creature is kept in confinement with a Spanish woman and a Turk to watch over her, and no one thinks of demanding an investigation! It 's monstrous!"

"My boy, you 're right. Never liked the man myself—confess it now—but I did n't know anything against him. Pretty difficult to interfere, what? Never occurred to me to do so."

"I am deeply pained by your attitude to your unfortunate cousin, who paid with his life for his devotion to an afflicted woman. I feel it my duty to say that your suspicions are unworthy of you. I must go now; I have some

parochial duties to attend to." And with scant ceremony the vicar stalked out of the room.

"It 's getting late, I see. Must be off too. Can't be late for dinner—wife, you know. Why don't you come with me—gloomy here—delighted to put you up. Do come," urged Twombley.

"Thanks awfully, not to-night. I 'm dead beat. It 's awfully good of you to suggest it, though."

"Not at all; sorry you won't come. See you at the inquest," said Twombley as he took his departure followed by the coroner.

Cyril remained where they left him. He was too weary to move. Before him on the desk lay his cousin's blotter. It 's white surface still bore the impress of the latter's thick, sprawling handwriting. That chair not so many hours ago had held his unwieldy form. The murdered man's presence seemed to permeate the room. Cyril shuddered involuntarily. The heavy, perfume-laden air stifled him. What was that? He could hear nothing but the tumultuous beating of his own heart. Yet he was sure, warned by some mysterious instinct, that he was not alone. Behind him stood—something. He longed to

move, but terror riveted him to the spot. A vision of his cousin's baleful eyes rose before him with horrible vividness. He could feel their vindictive glare scorching him. Was he going mad? Was he a coward? No, he must face the —thing—come what might. Throwing back his head defiantly, he wheeled around—the detective was at his elbow! Cyril gave a gasp of relief and wiped the tell-tale perspiration from his forehead. He had completely forgotten the fellow. What a shocking state his nerves were in!

"Can you spare me a few minutes, my lord?" Whenever the detective spoke, Cyril had the curious impression as of a voice issuing from a fog. So grey, so effaced, so absolutely characterless was the man's exterior! His voice, on the other hand, was excessively individual. There lurked in it a suggestion of assertiveness, of aggressiveness even. Cyril was conscious of a sudden dread of this strong, insistent personality, lying as it were at ambush within that envelope of a body, that envelope which he felt he could never penetrate, which gave no indication whether it concealed a friend or enemy, a saint or villain.

"I shall not detain you long," Judson added, as Cyril did not answer immediately.

"Come into the drawing-room," said Cyril, leading the way there.

Thank God, he could breathe freely once more, thought Cyril, as he flung himself into the comfortable depths of a chintz-covered sofa. How delightfully wholesome and commonplace was this room! The air, a trifle chill, notwithstanding the coal fire burning on the hearth, was like balm to his fevered senses. His very soul felt cleansed and refreshed. He no longer understood the terror which had so lately possessed him. He looked at Judson. How could he ever have dignified this remarkably unremarkable little man with his pompous manner into a mysterious and possibly hostile force. The thing was absurd.

"Sit down, Judson," said Cyril carelessly.

"My lord, am I not right in supposing that I am unknown to you? By reputation, I mean."

"Quite," Cyril candidly acknowledged.

"Ah! I thought so. Let me tell you then, my lord, that I am the receptacle of the secrets of most, if not all, of the aristocracy."

"Indeed!" said Cyril. I'll take good care, he thought, that mine don't swell the number.

"That being the case, it is clear that my reputation for discretion is unassailable. You see the force of that argument, my lord?"

"Certainly," replied Cyril wearily.

"Anything, therefore, which I may discover during the course of this investigation, you may rest assured will be kept absolutely secret." He paused a moment. "You can, therefore, confide in me without fear," continued the detective.

Cyril was surprised and a little startled. What did the man know?

"What makes you think I have anything to confide?" he asked.

"It is quite obvious, my lord, that you are holding something back—something which would explain your attitude towards Lady Wilmersley."

"I don't follow you," replied Cyril, on his guard.

"You have given every one to understand that you have never seen her ladyship. You take up a stranger's cause very warmly, my lord."

"I trust I shall always espouse the cause of every persecuted woman."

"But how are you sure that she was persecuted? Every one praises his lordship's devotion to her. He gave her everything she could wish for except liberty. If she was insane, his conduct deserves great praise."

"But I am sure she is not."

"But you yourself urged me to secure her as soon as possible because you were afraid she might do further harm," Judson reminded him.

"That was before I heard Douglas's testimony. He has seen her daily for three years and swears she is sane."

"And the opinion of an ignorant servant is sufficient to make you condemn his lordship without further proof?"

Cyril moved uneasily.

"If Lady Wilmersley is perfectly sane, it seems to me incredible that she did not manage to escape years ago. A note dropped out of her carriage would have brought the whole countryside to her rescue. Why, she had only to appeal to this very same butler, who is convinced of her sanity, and Lord Wilmersley could not have prevented her from leaving the castle. Public opinion would have protected her."

"That is true," acknowledged Cyril, "but her spirit may have been broken."

"What was there to break it? We hear only of his lordship's almost excessive devotion. No, my lord, I can't help thinking that you are judging both Lord and Lady Wilmersley by facts of which I am ignorant."

Cyril did not know what to answer. He had at first championed Lady Wilmersley because he had believed her to be his *protégée,* but now that it had been proved that she was not, why was he still convinced that she had in some way been a victim of her husband's cruelty? He had to acknowledge that beyond a vague distrust of his cousin he had not only no adequate reason, but no reason at all, for his suspicions.

"You are mistaken," he said at last; "I am withholding nothing that could in any way assist you to unravel this mystery. I confess I neither liked nor trusted my cousin. I had no special reason. It was simply a case of Dr. Fell. I know no more than you do of his treatment of her ladyship. But does n't the choice of a Turk and a Spaniard as attendants on Lady Wilmersley seem to you open to criticism?"

"Not necessarily, my lord. We trust most those we know best. Lord Wilmersley had spent the greater part of his life with Turks and Spaniards. It therefore seems to me quite natural that when it came to selecting guardians for her ladyship, he should have chosen a man and a woman he had presumably known for some years, whose worth he had proved, whose fidelity he could rely on."

"That sounds plausible," agreed Cyril; "still I can't help thinking it very peculiar, to say the least, that Lady Wilmersley was not under a doctor's care."

"Her ladyship may have been too unbalanced to mingle with people, and yet not in a condition to require medical attention. Such cases are not uncommon."

"True, and yet I have a feeling that Douglas was right, when he assured us that her ladyship is not insane. You discredit his testimony on the ground that he is an ignorant man. But if a man of sound common-sense has the opportunity of observing a woman daily during three years, it seems to me that his opinion cannot be lightly ignored. You never knew my cousin.

Well, I did, and as I said before, he was a man who inspired me with the profoundest distrust, although I cannot cite one fact to justify my aversion. I cannot believe that he ever sacrificed himself for any one and am much more inclined to credit Douglas's suggestion that it was jealousy which led him to keep her ladyship in such strict seclusion. But why waste our time in idle conjectures when it is so easy to find out the truth? Those two doctors who saw her yesterday must be found. If they are men of good reputation, of course I shall accept their report as final."

"Very good, my lord, I will at once have an advertisement inserted in all the papers asking them to communicate with us. If that does not fetch them, I shall employ other means of tracing them."

"Has Lady Upton, her ladyship's grandmother, been heard from?"

"She wired this morning asking for further particulars. Mr. Twombley answered her, I believe."

A slight pause ensued during which Judson watched Cyril as if expecting him to speak.

"And you have still nothing to say to me, my lord?" The detective spoke with evident disappointment.

"No, what else should I have to say?" replied Cyril with some surprise.

"That is, of course, for you to judge, my lord." His meaning was unmistakable. Cyril flushed angrily. Was it possible that the man dared to doubt his word? Dared to disbelieve his positive assertion that he knew nothing whatsoever about the murder? The damnable—suddenly he remembered! Remembered the lies he had been so glibly telling all day. Why should any one believe him in future? His ignominy was probably already stamped on his face.

"I have nothing more to say," replied Cyril in a strangely meek voice.

"That being the case, I 'd better be off," said Judson, rising slowly from his chair.

"Where are you going now?"

"I can't quite tell, my lord. It is my intention to vanish, so to speak."

"Vanish."

"Yes, my lord. I work best in the dark; but

you will hear from me as soon as I have something definite to report."

"I hope you will be successful," said Cyril.

"Thank you; I 've never failed so far in anythink I have undertaken. I must, however, warn you, my lord, that investigations sometimes lead to conclusions which no one could have foreseen when they were started. I always make a point of reminding my employers of this possibility."

What the devil was the man driving at, thought Cyril; did he suspect him by any chance? That would be really too absurd! The man was an ass.

"I shall never quarrel with you for discovering the truth," said Cyril, drawing himself up to his full height and glaring fiercely down at the little grey man. Then, turning abruptly on his heel he stalked indignantly out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTERIOUS MAID

"My lord."

Cyril shook himself reluctantly awake.

"Sorry to disturb you, but this 'as just come," said Peter, holding out a tray on which lay an opened telegram. His expression was so tragic that Cyril started up and seized the message.

It was addressed to Peter Thompkins, Geralton Castle, Newhaven, and read: "Change for the better. Your presence necessary." Signed, "Stuart-Smith."

"Why, that is good news!" cried Cyril greatly relieved. "What are you pulling such a long face for?"

"You call it good news that you have n't got rid of that young woman yet?" exclaimed Peter. "This Stuart-Smith, whoever he may be, who is wiring you to come to 'er, thinks she 's your

wife, does n't he? That was bad enough when you were just Mr. Crichton, but now it 's just hawful. A Lady Wilmersley can't be hid as a Mrs. Crichton could, begging your pardon. Oh, it 'll all come out, so it will, and you 'll be 'ad up for bigamy, like as not!" Peter almost groaned.

"Nonsense! As soon as the young lady recovers, she will join her friends and no one will be any the wiser."

Peter shook his head incredulously.

"Well, my lord, let 's 'ope so! But what answer am I to send to this telegram? You can't leave the castle now."

"It would certainly be inconvenient," agreed his master.

"If you did, you 'd be followed, my lord."

"What do you mean? The police can't be such fools as all that."

"'T is n't the police, my lord. It 's those men from the newspapers. The castle is full of them; they 're nosing about heverywhere; there 's not one of us as has n't been pestered with the fellows. It 's what you are like, what are you doing, what 'ave you done, and a lot more foolish

questions hever since we set foot here yesterday afternoon. And 'we 'll pay you well,' they say. Of course, I 've not opened my mouth to them, but they 're that persistent, they 'll follow you to the end of the earth if you should leave the castle unexpectedly."

This was a complication that had not occurred to Cyril, and yet he felt he ought to have foreseen it. What was to be done? He could n't abandon the girl. Suddenly Stuart-Smith's stern face and uncompromising upper lip rose vividly before him. Even if he wished to do so, the doctor would never allow him to ignore his supposed wife. If he did not answer his summons in person, Smith would certainly put the worst interpretation on his absence. He would argue that only a brute would neglect a wife who was lying seriously ill and the fact that the girl had been flogged could also be remembered against him. Dr. Smith was capable of taking drastic measures to force him into performing what he considered the latter's obvious duty.

Cyril did not know what to do. He had only a choice of evils. If he went, he would surely

be followed and the girl's existence and hiding-place discovered. That would be fatal not only to him but to her, for she had feared detection above all things—why, he could not even surmise —he no longer even cared; but he had promised to protect her and meant to do so.

On the other hand, if he did not go, he ran the risk of the doctor's publishing the girl's whereabouts. Still, it was by no means certain he would do so, and if he wrote Smith a diplomatic letter, he might succeed in persuading him that it was best for the girl if he stayed away a day longer. Yes, that was the thing to do. Hastily throwing on a dressing-gown, he sat down at the desk. It was a difficult letter to write and he destroyed many sheets before he was finally satisfied. This was the result of his efforts:

"DEAR DR. STUART-SMITH:

"I am infinitely relieved that your patient is better. As you addressed your wire here, I gather that you know of the tragic occurrence, which has kept me from her side. It is impossible for me to leave before the funeral without explaining my mission, and this I am very loath

to do, as I am more than ever anxious to keep her malady a secret. Dr. Monet has always believed in the possibility of a cure, and as long as there is a chance of that, I am sure you will agree with me that I ought to make every sacrifice to protect her from gossip. If she did recover and her illness became known, it would greatly handicap her in her new life. Having to stay away from her would be even more distressing to me than it is if I could flatter myself that my presence would have a good effect upon her. I am sure, however, that such would not be the case.

"I shall return to London late to-morrow afternoon and will telephone you immediately on my arrival.

" I am sending this by a trustworthy servant, who will bring me your answer. I am most anxious to hear what you think of your patient's condition, mentally as well as physically. I am sure she could not be in better hands."

Then Cyril hesitated. What should he sign himself? Thompkins? No, he wished to inspire confidence; his own name would be better. So with a firm hand he wrote " Wilmersley."

It was the first time he had used his new signature and he heartily wished it had not been appended to such a document.

"Now, Peter," he said, "you must take the next train to London and carry this to Dr. Stuart-Smith. If he is not at the nursing home, telephone to his house and find out where he is. The letter must be delivered as soon as possible and you are to wait for a reply. If the doctor asks you any questions, answer as briefly as possible. In order to avoid comment you had better let it be known that you are going up to town to do some shopping for me. Buy something—anything. I want you also to call at the lodgings and tell them we shall return to-morrow. If you are followed, which I can't believe you will be, this will allay suspicion. Take a taxi and get back as soon as possible. Don't drive directly to the Home. You may mention to the doctor that I am extremely anxious about Mrs. Thompkins."

"Very good, my lord."

"Throw the sheets I have scribbled on into the fire and the blotting paper as well," ordered Cyril.

He felt rather proud of having thought of this

detail, but with detectives and pressmen prowling around he must run no risks. It was with a very perturbed mind that Cyril finally went down to breakfast.

"Mrs. Eversley would like to speak to you, my lord, as soon as convenient," said Douglas as his master rose from the table. Cyril fancied he detected a gleam of suppressed excitement in the butler's eye.

"I 'll see her at once," Cyril answered.

A stout, respectable-looking woman hesitated in the doorway.

"Come in, Mrs. Eversley," cried Cyril. "I 'm glad to see you again. I 've never forgotten you or your doughnuts."

The troubled face broke into a pleased smile as the woman dropped a courtesy.

"It 's very kind of you to remember them, my lord, very kind indeed, and glad I am to see you again." The smile vanished. "This is a terrible business, my lord."

"Terrible," assented Cyril.

"His poor lordship! Mrs. Valdriguez has said for months and months that something like this was sure to happen some day."

"Do you mean to say that she prophesied that her ladyship would kill his lordship?" exclaimed Cyril.

"Yes, my lord, indeed she did! It made me feel that queer when it really 'appened."

"I should think so. It 's most extraordinary."

"But begging your pardon, my lord, there is something special as made me ask to speak to you—something I thought you ought to know immediately."

"What is it?" Cyril had felt that some new trouble was brewing.

"One of the servants has disappeared, my lord."

"Disappeared? How? When?"

"Perhaps I 'm making too much of it, but is murder has that upset me that I 'm afraid of my own shadow and I says to myself, says I: 'Don't wait; go and tell his lordship at once and he 'll know whether it is important or not.'"

"You did perfectly right. But who has disappeared?"

"Priscilla Prentice and perhaps she has n't disappeared at all. This is how it is: The day before yesterday——"

"The day of the murder?" asked Cyril.

"Yes, my lord. Prentice came to me and asked if she could go to Newhaven to see a cousin she has there. The cousin is ill—leastways so she told me—and she wanted as a great favour to be allowed to spend the night with her, and she promised to come back by the carrier early next morning. It seemed all right, so I gave her permission and off she goes. Then yesterday this dreadful thing happened and Prentice went clean out of my head. I never thought of her again till breakfast this morning when Mr. Douglas says to me: 'Why, wherever is Miss Prentice?' You could 'ave knocked me down with a feather, I was that taken aback! So I says, 'Whatever can 'ave happened to her?'"

"When she heard of the murder, she may have taken fright. She may be waiting to return to the castle till the inquest and funeral are over," suggested Cyril.

"Then she ought at least to have sent word. Besides she should have got back before she could have heard of the murder."

"You had better send to the cousin's and find

out if she is there. She may have been taken ill and had nobody to send a message by."

"We none of us know whereabouts this cousin lives, my lord."

"Newhaven is not a large place. It can't be difficult to find her."

"But we don't know her name, my lord."

"That certainly complicates matters. How long has this girl been at the castle?"

"Six months, my lord."

"Who did you get her from?"

"I advertised for her, my lord. Mrs. Valdriguez's eyes are not what they were and so she 'ad to have somebody to do the mending. I must say foreigners sew beautifully, so it was some time before I could get any one whose work suited Mrs. Valdriguez."

"What references did the girl give?"

"It was this way, my lord. She 's very young, and this is her first place. But she was excellently recommended by Mr. Vaughan, vicar of Plumtree, who wrote that she was a most respectable girl and that he could vouch for her character. Those are his very words, my lord."

"That certainly sounded satisfactory."

"I 'm glad you think so, my lord. So she came. Such a nice young woman she seemed, so 'ard-working and conscientious; one who kept 'erself to 'erself; never a word with the men —never, though she is so pretty."

"Oh, she is pretty, is she?" A faint but horrible suspicion flashed through Cyril's mind.

"Yes, my lord, as pretty as a picture."

"What does she look like?"

"She is tall and slight with dark hair and blue eyes," Mrs. Eversley answered. She was evidently taken aback at her master's interest in a servant's appearance and a certain reserve crept into her voice.

"Could she—would it be possible to mistake her for a lady?" stammered Cyril.

Mrs. Eversley started.

"Well, my lord, it 's strange you should ask that, for Douglas, he always has said, 'Mark my words, Miss Prentice is n't what she seems,' and I must say she is very superior, very."

It was n't, it could n't be possible, thought Cyril; and yet——

"Did she see much of her ladyship?" he asked.

"Lately, Mrs. Valdriguez, seeing as what she was such a quiet girl, has allowed her to put the things she has mended back into her ladyship's room, and I know her ladyship has spoken to her, but how often she has done so I could n't really say. Prentice did n't talk much."

"Did she seem much interested in her ladyship?"

"At first very much so. If we were talking about her ladyship, she would always stay and listen. Once, when one of the housemaids 'ad said something about her being crazy, I think, Prentice got quite excited, and when Mrs. Valdriguez had left the room, she said to me, 'I don't believe there is anything the matter with her ladyship; I think it just cruel the way she is kept locked up!' Begging your pardon, my lord, those were her very words. She made me promise not to repeat what she had said—least of all to Mrs. Valdriguez, and I never have, not till this minute."

"Did she ever suggest that she would like to help her ladyship to escape?"

"Why, my lord!" exclaimed Mrs. Eversley, staring at her master in astonishment. "That 's

just what she did do, just once—oh, you don't think she did it! And yet that 's what they 're all saying——"

"Is anything missing from her room?" he asked.

"I can't say, my lord; her trunk is locked and she took a small bag with her. But there are things in the drawers and a skirt and a pair of shoes in the wardrobe."

"From the appearance of the room, therefore, you should judge that she intended to return?"

"Ye-es, my lord—and yet I must say, I was surprised to see so few things about, and the skirt and shoes were very shabby."

"I suppose that by this time every one knows the girl is missing?" Cyril asked.

"The upper servants do, and the detective was after me to tell him all about her, but I would n't say a word till I had asked what your lordship's wishes are."

"I thought Judson had left the castle?"

"So he has, my lord; this is the man from Scotland Yard. Griggs is his name. He was 'ere before Judson, but he had left the castle before you arrived."

Impossible even to attempt to keep her disappearance a secret, thought Cyril. After all, perhaps she was not his *protégée*. He was always jumping at erroneous conclusions, and a description is so misleading. On the other hand, the combination of black hair and blue eyes was a most unusual one. Besides, it was already sufficiently remarkable that two young and beautiful women had fled from Newhaven on the same day (beauty being alas such a rarity!), but that three should have done so was well-nigh incredible. But could even the most superior of upper servants possess that air of breeding which was one of the girl's most noticeable attributes. It was, of course, within the bounds of possibility that this maid was well-born and simply forced by poverty into a menial position. One thing was certain—if his *protégée* was Priscilla Prentice, then this girl, in spite of her humble occupation, was a lady, and consequently more than ever in need of his protection and respect.

Well, assuming that it was Prentice he had rescued, what part had she played in the tragedy? Why had she feared arrest? She must have

been present at the murder, but even in that case, why did she not realise that Lady Wilmersley's unbalanced condition would prevent suspicion from falling on any one else? The police had never even thought of her! And where had she hidden her mistress? It was all most mysterious.

Cyril sat weighing the *pros and cons* of one theory after another, completely oblivious of his housekeeper's presence.

Douglas, entering, discreetly interrupted his cogitations:

"The inquest is about to begin, my lord."

CHAPTER VII

THE INQUEST

ON entering the hall Cyril found that a seat on the right hand of the coroner had been reserved for him, but he chose a secluded corner from which he could watch the proceedings unobserved.

On the left of Mr. Tinker sat a tall, imposing-looking man, who, on inquiry, proved to be Inspector Griggs.

The first part of the inquest developed nothing new. It was only when Mustapha stepped forward that Cyril's interest revived and he forgot the problem of his *protégée's* identity.

The Turk, with the exception of a red fez, was dressed as a European, but his swarthy skin, large, beak-like nose, and deep, sombre eyes, in which brooded the mystery of the East, proclaimed his nationality.

Cyril tried in vain to form some estimate of the man's character, to probe the depths of those fathomless eyes, but ignorant as he was of the Oriental, he found it impossible to differentiate between Mustapha's racial and individual characteristics. That he was full of infinite possibilities was evident—even his calmness was suggestive of potential passion. A man to be watched, decided Cyril.

Mustapha gave his testimony in a low, clear voice, and although he spoke with a strong foreign accent, his English was purer than that of his fellow servants.

That he had nothing to do with the murder seemed from the first conclusively proved. Several of the servants had seen him enter his room, which adjoined that of the butler, at about half-past nine—that is to say, an hour and a half before Lord Wilmersley's death could, in the doctor's opinion, have taken place—and Douglas on cross-examination reiterated his conviction that Mustapha could not have left his room without his having heard him do so, as he, Douglas, was a very light sleeper.

In answer to questions from the coroner, Mus-

tapha told how he had entered the late Lord Wilmersley's service some fifteen years previously, at which time his master owned a house on the outskirts of Constantinople. As he dressed as a Mussulman and consorted entirely with the natives, Mustapha did not know that he was a foreigner till his master informed him of the fact just before leaving Turkey.

When questioned as to Lady Wilmersley, he was rather non-committal. No, he had never believed her to be dangerous.—Had she seemed happy? No, she cried often.—Did his lordship ever ill-treat her? Not that he knew of. His lordship was very patient with her tears.—Did he know how she could have obtained a pistol? Yes, there was one concealed on his master's desk. He had discovered that it was missing.—How could a pistol lie concealed *on* a desk? It was hidden inside an ancient steel gauntlet, ostensibly used as a paperweight. Mustapha had found it one day quite accidentally.—Did he tell his lordship of his discovery? No. His master was always afraid of being spied upon.—Why? He did not know.—Did Mustapha know of any enemy of his lordship who was likely to

have sought such a revenge? No. His master's enemies were not in England.—Then his lordship had enemies? As all men have, so had he.—But he had no special enemy? An enemy is an enemy, but his master's enemies were not near.—How could he be so sure of that? He would have had word.—How? From whom? From his, Mustapha's friends.—Did his lordship fear his enemies would follow him to England? At first, perhaps, but not lately.—If his lordship's enemies had found him, would they have been likely to kill him? Who can tell? The heart of man is very evil.—But he knew no one who could have done this thing? No one.—Did he believe his mistress had done it? Mustapha hesitated for the first time. "They say so," he finally answered.

"But you, what do you think?" insisted the coroner.

"The ways of women are dark."

"Do you believe her ladyship killed your master—Yes or No?" repeated the coroner impatiently.

"It is not for me to say," replied Mustapha with unruffled dignity.

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The coroner, feeling himself rebuked, dismissed the man with a hurried "That will do."

Mrs. Valdriguez was next called.

She was a tall, thin woman between fifty and sixty. Her black hair, freely sprinkled with silver, was drawn into a tight knot at the back of her small head. Her pale, haggard face, with its finely-chiselled nose, thin-lipped mouth, and slightly-retreating chin, was almost beautified by her large, sunken eyes, which still glowed with extraordinary brilliancy. Her black dress was austere in its simplicity and she wore no ornament except a small gold cross suspended on her bosom.

The woman was obviously nervous. She held her hands tightly clasped in front of her, and her lips twitched from time to time. She spoke so low that Cyril had to lean forward to catch her answers, but her English was perfectly fluent. It was chiefly her accent and intonation which betrayed her foreign birth.

"You lived here in the time of the late Lady Wilmersley, did you not?" began the coroner.

"Yes, sir."

"In what capacity?"

"As lady's maid, sir."

"When did you leave here, and why?"

"I left when her ladyship died."

"Did you return to Spain?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you happen to enter the present Lady Wilmersley's service?"

"Lord Wilmersley sent for me when he was on his wedding journey.

"Had you seen him after you left Geralton?"

"From time to time."

"Do you know whether his lordship had any enemies?"

"Not of late years."

"Then you did know some. Who were they?"

"Those that he had are either dead or have forgiven," Valdriguez answered, and as she did so, she fingered the cross on her breast.

"So that you can think of no one likely to have resorted to such a terrible revenge?"

"No one, sir."

"On the night of the murder you did not assist her ladyship to undress, so I understand?"

"I never did. From the time her ladyship

left her room to go to dinner I never saw her again till the following morning."

"And you noticed nothing unusual that evening?"

"I can't say that. Her ladyship was very much excited. She cried and begged me to help her to escape."

A murmur of excitement ran through the hall.

"What did you say to her?"

"I told her that she was his lordship's lawful wife; that she had vowed before God to honour and obey him in all things."

"Had she ever made an attempt to escape?"

"No, sir."

"Did she ever give you any reason for wishing to do so?"

"She told me that his lordship threatened to shut her up in a lunatic asylum, but I assured her he would never do so. He loved her too much."

"You consider that he was very devoted to her?"

The woman closed her eyes for a second.

"He loved her as I have never before known

a man love a woman," she answered, with suppressed vehemence.

"Why then did he send for the doctors to commit her to an institution?"

"I do not know."

At this point of the interrogation Cyril scribbled a few words, which he gave to one of the footmen to carry to the coroner. When the latter had read them, he asked:

"Did you consider her ladyship a dangerous lunatic?"

"No, sir."

"Why, then, did you prophesy that she would kill your master?"

The woman trembled slightly and her hand again sought the cross.

"I—I believed Lord Wilmersley's time had come, but I knew not how he would die. I did not know that she would be the instrument—only I feared it."

"Why did you think his lordship's days were numbered?"

"Sir, if I were to tell you my reasons, you would say that they were not reasons. You would call them superstitions and me a foolish

old woman. I believe what I believe, and you, what you have been taught. God shall judge. Suffice it, sir, that my reasons for believing that his lordship would die soon are not such as would appeal to your common-sense."

"H'm, well—I confess that signs and omens are not much in my line, but I must really insist upon your giving some explanation as to why you feared that your mistress would murder Lord Wilmersley."

The woman's lips twitched convulsively and her eyes glowed with sombre fire.

"Because—if you will know it—he loved her more than was natural—he loved her more than his God; and the Lord God is a jealous God."

"And this is really your only reason for your extraordinary supposition?"

"For me it is enough," she replied.

"Well, well—very curious indeed!" said the coroner, regarding the woman intently.

He paused for a moment.

"How did you pass the evening of the murder?" he asked.

"In my room. I had a headache and went early to bed."

"I suppose somebody saw you after you left Lady Wilmersley's room who can support your statement?"

"I do not know. I do not remember seeing any one," answered Valdriguez, throwing her head back and looking a little defiantly at Mr. Tinker.

"Ah, really? That is a pity," said the coroner. "However, there is no reason to doubt your word—as yet," he added.

Mrs. Eversley was next called. The coroner questioned her exhaustively as to the missing Priscilla Prentice. He seemed especially anxious to know whether the girl had owned a bicycle. She had not.—Did she know how to ride one? Yes, Mrs. Eversley had seen her try one belonging to the under-housemaid.—Did many of the servants own bicycles? Yes.—Had one of them been taken? She did not know.

On further inquiry, however, it was found that all the machines were accounted for.

It had not occurred to Cyril to speculate as to how, if Prentice had really aided her mistress to escape, she had been able to cover the nine miles which separated the castle from Newhaven.

Eighteen miles in one evening on foot! Not perhaps an impossible feat, but very nearly so, especially as on her way back she would have been handicapped by Lady Wilmersley, a delicate woman, quite unaccustomed—at all events during the last three years—to any form of exercise.

It was evident, however, that this difficulty had not escaped the coroner, for all the servants and more especially the gardeners and under-gardeners were asked if they had seen in any of the less-frequented paths traces of a carriage or bicycle. But no one had seen or heard anything suspicious.

The head gardener and his wife, who lived at the Lodge, swore that the tall, iron gates had been locked at half-past nine, and that they had heard no vehicle pass on the highroad during the night.

At this point in the proceedings whispering was audible in the back of the hall. The coroner paused to see what was the matter. A moment later Douglas stepped up to him and said something in a low voice. The coroner nodded.

"Mrs. Willis," he called.

A middle-aged woman, very red in the face, came reluctantly forward.

"Well, Mrs. Willis, I hear you have something to tell me?"

"Indeed no, sir," exclaimed the woman, picking nervously at her gloves. "It is nothing at all. Only when I 'eard you asking about carriages in the night, I says to Mrs. Jones—well, one passed, I know that. Leastways, it did n't exactly pass; it stayed."

"The carriage stayed; where?"

"It was n't a carriage."

"It was n't a carriage and it stayed? Can't you explain yourself more clearly, Mrs. Willis? This is n't a conundrum, is it?"

"It was a car, a motor-car," stammered the woman.

"A car! And it stopped? Where?"

"I could n't say exactly, but not far from our cottage."

"And where is your cottage?"

"On the 'ighroad near the long lane."

"I see." The coroner was obviously excited. "Your husband is one of the gardeners here, is n't he?"

"Yes, sir."

"So there is doubtless a path connecting your cottage with the castle grounds?"

"Yes, sir."

"About how far from your cottage was the car?"

"I did n't see it, sir; I just 'eard it; but it was n't far, that I know," reiterated the woman.

"Did you hear any one pass through your garden?"

"No, sir."

"Could they have done so without your hearing them?"

"They might."

"Was the car going to or coming from Newhaven?"

"It was coming from Newhaven."

"Then it must have stopped at the foot of the long lane."

"Yes, sir; that 's just about where I thought it was."

"Is there a path connecting Long Lane with the highroad?"

"Yes, a narrow one."

"What time was it when you heard the car? Now try and be very accurate."

"I would n't like to swear, sir, but I think it was between eleven and twelve."

"Did your husband hear it also?"

"No, sir, 'e was fast asleep, but I was n't feeling very well, so I had got up thinking I 'd make myself a cup of tea, and just then I 'eard a car come whizzing along, and then there was a bang. Oh, says I, they 've burst their wheel, that 's what they 've done, me knowing about cars. I know it takes a bit of mending, a wheel does, so I was n't surprised when I 'eard no more of them for a time—and I 'ad just about forgotten all about them, so I had, when I 'ears them move off."

"And they did not pass your cottage?"

"No, sir, I 'm sure of that."

"Did you hear anything else?"

"Well, sir"—the woman fidgeted uneasily, "I thought—but I should n't like to swear to it—not on the Bible—but I fancied I 'eard a cry."

"What sort of a cry? Was it a man or a woman's?"

"I really could n't say—and perhaps what I 'eard was not a cry at all——"

"Well, well—this is most important. A motor-car that is driven at half-past eleven at night to the foot of a lane which leads nowhere but to the castle grounds, and then returns in the direction it came from—very extraordinary—very. We must look into this," exclaimed the coroner.

And with this the inquest was adjourned.

CHAPTER VIII

LADY UPTON

DR. STUART-SMITH to Mr. Peter Thompkins, Geralton Castle, Newhaven.

"DEAR LORD WILMERSLEY:

"Lady Wilmersley showed sings of returning consciousness at half-past five yesterday afternoon. I was at once sent for, but when I arrived she had fallen asleep. She woke again at nine o'clock and this time asked where she was. She spoke indistinctly and did not seem to comprehend what the nurse said to her. When I reached the patient, I found her sitting up in bed. Her pulse was irregular; her temperature, subnormal. I am glad to be able to assure you that Lady Wilmersley is at present perfectly rational. She is, however, suffering from hysterical amnesia complicated by aphasia, but I

trust this is only a temporary affection. At first she hesitated over the simplest words, but before I left she could talk with tolerable fluency.

"I asked Lady Wilmersley whether she wished to see you. She has not only forgotten that she has a husband but has no very clear idea as to what a husband is. In fact, she appears to have preserved no precise impression of anything. She did not even remember her own name. When I told it to her, she said it sounded familiar, only that she did not associate it with herself. Of you personally she has no recollection, although I described you as accurately as I could. However, as your name is the only thing she even dimly recalls, I hope that when you see her, you will be able to help her bridge the gulf which separates her from the past.

"She seemed distressed at her condition, so I told her that she had been ill and that it was not uncommon for convalescents to suffer temporarily from loss of memory. When I left her, she was perfectly calm.

"She slept well last night, and this morning she has no difficulty in expressing herself, but

I do not allow her to talk much as she is still weak.

"I quite understand the delicacy of your position and sympathise with you most deeply. Although I am anxious to try what effect your presence will have on Lady Wilmersley, the experiment can be safely postponed till to-morrow afternoon.

"I trust the inquest will clear up the mystery which surrounds the late Lord Wilmersley's death.

"Believe me,

"Sincerely yours,

"A. STUART-SMITH."

Cyril stared at the letter aghast. If the girl herself had forgotten her identity, how could he hope to find out the truth? He did not even dare to instigate a secret inquiry—certainly not till the Geralton mystery had been cleared up. And she believed herself to be his wife! It was too awful!

Cyril passed a sleepless night and the next morning found him still undecided as to what course to pursue. It was, therefore, a pale face

and a preoccupied mien that he presented to the inspection of the county, which had assembled in force to attend his cousin's funeral. Never in the memory of man had such an exciting event taken place and the great hall in which the catafalque had been erected was thronged with men of all ages and conditions.

In the state drawing-room Cyril stood and received the condolences and faced the curiosity of the county magnates.

The ordeal was almost over, when the door was again thrown open and the butler announced, "Lady Upton."

Leaning heavily on a gold-headed cane Lady Upton advanced majestically into the room.

A sudden hush succeeded her entrance; every eye was riveted upon her. She seemed, however, superbly indifferent to the curiosity she aroused, and one felt, somehow, that she was not only indifferent but contemptuous.

She was a tall woman, taller, although she stooped a little, than most of the men present. Notwithstanding her great age, she gave the impression of extraordinary vigour. Her face was long and narrow, with a stern, hawk-like

nose, a straight, uncompromising mouth, and a protruding chin. Her scanty, white hair was drawn tightly back from her high forehead; a deep furrow separated her bushy, grey eyebrows and gave an added fierceness to her small, steel-coloured eyes. An antiquated bonnet perched perilously on the back of her head; her dress was quite obviously shabby; and yet no one could for a moment have mistaken her for anything but a truly great lady.

Disregarding Cyril's outstretched hand, she deliberately raised her lorgnette and looked at him for a moment in silence.

"Well! You are a Crichton at any rate," she said at last. Having given vent to this ambiguous remark, she waved her glasses, as if to sweep away the rest of the company, and continued: "I wish to speak to you alone."

Her voice was deep and harsh and she made no effort to lower it.

"So this was Anita Wilmersley's grandmother. What an old tartar!" thought Cyril.

"It is almost time for the funeral to start," he said aloud and he tried to convey by his manner that he, at any rate, had no in-

tention of allowing her to ride rough-shod over him.

"I know," she snapped, "so hurry, please. These gentlemen will excuse us."

"Certainly." "Of course." "We will wait in the hall." Cyril heard them murmur and, such was the force of the old lady's personality, that youths and grey beards jostled each other in their anxiety to get out of the room as quickly as possible.

"Get me a chair," commanded Lady Upton. "No, not that one. I want to sit down, not lie down."

With her stick she indicated a high, straight-backed chair, which had been relegated to a corner.

Having seated herself, she took a pair of spectacles out of her reticule and proceeded to wipe them in a most leisurely manner.

Cyril fidgeted impatiently.

Finally, her task completed to her own satisfaction, she adjusted her glasses and crossed her hands over the top of her cane.

"No news of my granddaughter, I suppose," she demanded.

"None, I am sorry to say."

"Anita is a fool, but I am certain—absolutely certain, mind you—that she did not kill that precious husband of hers, though I don't doubt he richly deserved it."

"I am surprised that you of all people should speak of my cousin in that tone," said Cyril and he looked at her meaningly.

"Of course, you believe what every one believes, that I forced Ann into that marriage. Stuff and nonsense! I merely pointed out to her that she could not do better than take him. She had not a penny to her name and after my death would have been left totally unprovided-for. I have only my dower, as you know."

"But, how could you have allowed a girl whose mind was affected to marry?"

"Fiddlesticks! You don't believe that nonsense, do you? Newspaper twaddle, that is all that amounts to."

"I beg your pardon, Arthur himself gave out that her condition was such that she was unable to see any one."

"Impossible! He wrote to me quite frequently and never hinted at such a thing."

"Nevertheless I assure you that is the case."

"Then he is a greater blackguard than I took him to be——"

"But did you not know that he kept her practically a prisoner here?"

"Certainly not!"

"And she never complained to you of his treatment of her?"

"I once got a hysterical letter from her begging me to let her come back to me, but as the only reason she gave for wishing to leave her husband was that he was personally distasteful to her, I wrote back that as she had made her bed, she must lie on it."

"And even after that appeal you never made an attempt to see Anita and find out for yourself how Arthur was treating her?"

"I am not accustomed to being cross-questioned, Lord Wilmersley. I am accountable to no one but my God for what I have done or failed to do. I never liked Anita. She takes after her father, whom my daughter married without my consent. When she was left an orphan, I took charge of her and did my duty by her; but I never pretended that I was not

glad when she married and, as she did so of her own free-will, I cannot see that her future life was any concern of mine."

Cyril could hardly restrain his indignation. This proud, hard, selfish old woman had evidently never ceased to visit her resentment of her daughter's marriage on the child of that marriage. He could easily picture the loveless and miserable existence poor Anita must have led. Was it surprising that she should have taken the first chance that was offered her of escaping from her grandmother's thraldom? She had probably been too ignorant to realise what sort of a man Arthur Wilmersley really was and too innocent to know what she was pledging herself to.

"I have come here to-day," continued Lady Upton, "because I considered it seemly that my granddaughter's only relative should put in an appearance at the funeral and also because I wanted you to tell me exactly what grounds the police have for suspecting Anita."

Cyril related as succinctly as possible everything which had so far come to light. He, however, carefully omitted to mention his meeting

with the girl on the train. As the latter could not be Anita Wilmersley, he felt that he was not called upon to inform Lady Upton of this episode.

"Well!" exclaimed Lady Upton, when he had finished. "All I can say is, that Anita is quite incapable of firing a pistol at any one, even if it were thrust into her hand. You may not believe me, but that is because you don't know her. I do. She has n't the spirit of a mouse. Unless Arthur had frightened her out of her wits, she would never have screwed up courage to leave him, and it would be just like her to crawl away in the night instead of walking out of the front door like a sensible person. Bah! I have no patience with such a spineless creature! You men, however, consider it an engaging feminine attribute for a woman to have neither character nor sense!" Lady Upton snorted contemptuously and glared at Cyril as if she held him personally responsible for the bad taste of his sex.

As he made no answer to her tirade, she continued after a moment more calmly.

"It seems to me highly improbable that Anita

has been murdered; so I want you to engage a decent private detective who will work only for us. We must find her before the police do so. I take it for granted that you will help me in this matter and that you are anxious—although, naturally, not as anxious as I am—to prevent your cousin's widow from being arrested."

"A woman who has been treated by her husband as Arthur seems to have treated Anita, is entitled to every consideration that her husband's family can offer her," replied Cyril. "I am already employing a detective and if he finds Anita I will communicate with you at once."

"Good! Now remember that my granddaughter is perfectly sane; on the other hand, I think it advisable to keep this fact a secret for the present. Circumstantial evidence is so strongly against her that we may have to resort to the plea of insanity to save her neck. That girl has been a thorn in my flesh since the day she was born; but she shall not be hanged, if I can help it," said Lady Upton, shutting her mouth with an audible click.

CHAPTER IX

THE JEWELS

As soon as the funeral was over, Cyril left Geralton. On arriving in London he recognised several reporters at the station. Fearing that they might follow him, he ordered his taxi to drive to the Carlton. There he got out and walking quickly through the hotel, he made his exit by a rear door. Having assured himself that he was not being observed, he hailed another taxi and drove to the nursing home.

"Well, Mr. Thompkins," exclaimed the doctor, with ponderous facetiousness. "I am glad to be able to tell you that Mrs. Thompkins is much better."

"And her memory?" faltered Cyril.

"It 's improving. She does not yet remember people or incidents, but she is beginning to re-

call certain places. For instance, I asked her yesterday if she had been to Paris. It suggested nothing to her, but this morning she told me with great pride that Paris was a city and that it had a wide street with an arch at one end. So you see she is progressing; only we must not hurry her."

Cyril murmured a vague assent.

"Of course," continued the doctor, "you must be very careful when you see Lady Wilmersley to restrain your emotions, and on no account to remind her of the immediate past. I hope and believe she will never remember it. On the other hand, I wish you to talk about those of her friends and relations for whom she has shown a predilection. Her memory must be gently stimulated, but on no account excited. Quiet, quiet is essential to her recovery."

"But doctor—I must—it's frightfully important that my wife (he found himself calling her so quite glibly) should be told of a certain fact at once. If I wait even a day, it will be too late," urged Cyril.

"And you have reason to suppose that this communication will agitate Lady Wilmersley?"

"I—I fear so."

"Then I can certainly not permit it. You don't seem to realise the delicate condition of her brain. Why, it might be fatal," insisted the doctor.

Cyril felt as if Nemesis were indeed overtaking him.

"Come, we will go to her," said the doctor, moving towards the door. "She is naturally a little nervous about seeing you, so we must not keep her waiting."

But Cyril hung back. If he could not undeceive the poor girl, how could he enter her presence. To pose as the husband of a woman so as to enable her to escape arrest was excusable, but to impose himself on the credulity of an afflicted girl was absolutely revolting. If he treated her with even the most decorous show of affection, he would be taking a dastardly advantage of the situation. Yet if he behaved with too much reserve, she would conclude that her husband was a heartless brute. Her husband! The one person she had to cling to in the isolation to which she had awakened. It was horrible! Oh, why had he ever placed her in such an impossible position? Arrest would

have been preferable. He was sure that she could easily have proved her innocence of whatever it was of which she was accused, and in a few days at the latest would have gone free without a stain on her character, while now, unless by some miracle this episode remained concealed, she was irredeemably compromised. He was a married man; she, for aught he knew to the contrary, might also be bound, or at all events have a fiancé or lover waiting to claim her. How would he view the situation? How would he receive the explanation? Cyril shuddered involuntarily. Every minute the chances that her secret could be kept decreased. If she did not return to her friends while it was still possible to explain or account for the time of her absence, he feared she would never be able to return at all. Yes, it would take a miracle to save her now!

"Well, Lord Wilmersley?"

Cyril started. The doctor's tone was peremptory and his piercing eyes were fixed searchingly upon him. What excuse could he give for refusing to meet his supposed wife? He could think of none.

"I must remind you, doctor," he faltered at last, "that my wife has lately detested me. I —I really don't think I had better see her—I— I am so afraid my presence will send her off her head again."

The doctor's upper lip grew rigid and his eyes contracted angrily.

"I have already assured you that she is perfectly sane. It is essential to her recovery that she should see somebody connected with her past life. I cannot understand your reluctance to meet Lady Wilmersley."

"I—I am only thinking of the patient," Cyril murmured feebly.

"The patient is my affair," snapped the doctor.

What could he do? For an instant he was again tempted to tell Stuart-Smith the truth. He looked anxiously at the man. No, it was impossible. There was no loophole for escape. And after all, he reflected, if he had an opportunity of watching the girl, she might quite unconsciously by some act, word, or even by some subtle essence of her personality furnish him with a clue to her past. Every occupation leaves indelible marks, although it sometimes

takes keen eyes to discern them. If the girl had been a seamstress, Cyril believed that he would be able by observing her closely to assure himself of the fact.

"Very well," he said aloud. "If you are willing to assume the responsibility, I will go to my wife at once. But I insist on your being present at our meeting."

"Certainly, if you wish it, but it is not at all necessary, I assure you," replied the doctor.

A moment later Cyril, blushing like a schoolgirl, found himself in a large, white-washed room. Before him on a narrow, iron bedstead lay his mysterious *protégée*. Cyril caught his breath. He had forgotten how beautiful she was. Her red lips were slightly parted and the colour ebbed and flowed in her transparent cheeks. Ignoring the doctor, her eager glance sought Cyril and for a minute the two young people gazed at each other in silence. How young, how innocent she looked! How could any one doubt the candour of those starlike eyes, thought Cyril.

"Well, Mrs. Crichton," exclaimed Stuart-Smith, "I have brought you the husband you have been so undutiful as to forget. 'Love,

honour, and obey, and above all remember,' I suggest as an amendment to the marriage vow."

"Nurse has been reading me the marriage service," said the girl, with a quaint mixture of pride and diffidence. "I know all about it now; I don't think I 'll forget again."

"Of course not! And now that you have seen your husband, do you find that you remember him at all?"

"Yes, a little. I know that I have seen you before," she answered, addressing Cyril.

"I gather from your manner that you don't exactly dislike him, do you?" asked the doctor with an attempt at levity. "Your husband is so modest that he is afraid to remain in your presence till you have reassured him on this point."

"I love him very much," was her astounding answer.

Cyril's heart gave a bound. Did she realise what she had said? She certainly showed no trace of embarrassment, and although her eyes clung persistently to his, their expression of childlike simplicity was absolutely disarming.

"Very good, very good, quite as it should be,"

exclaimed the doctor, evidently a little abashed by the frankness of the girl's reply. "That being the case, I will leave you two together to talk over old times, although they can't be very remote. I am sure, however, that when I see you again, you will be as full of reminiscences as an octogenarian," chuckled the doctor as he left the room.

Cyril and the girl were alone.

An arm-chair had been placed near the bed, obviously for his reception, and after a moment's hesitation he took it. The girl did not speak, but continued to look at him unflinchingly. Cyril fancied she regarded him with something of the unquestioning reverence a small child might have for a beloved parent. His eyes sank before hers. Never had he felt so unworthy, so positively guilty. He racked his brains for something to say, but the doctor's restrictions seemed to bar every topic which suggested itself to him. If he only knew who she was! He glanced at her furtively. In the dim light of the shaded lamp he had not noticed that what he had supposed was her hair, was in reality a piece of black lace bound turbanwise about her head.

"What are you wearing that bandage for?" he inquired eagerly. "Was your head hurt—my dear?" he added diffidently.

"No—I—I hope you won't be angry—nurse said you would—but I could n't help it. I really had to cut it off."

"Cut what off?"

"My hair." She hung her head as a naughty child might have done.

"You cut off your hair? But why?" His voice sounded suddenly harsh. Strange that her first act had been to destroy one of the few things by which she could be identified. Was she as innocent as she seemed? Had she fooled them all, even the doctor? This amnesia, or whatever it was called, was it real, was it assumed? He wondered.

"Oh, husband, I know it was wrong; but when I woke up and could n't remember anything, I was so frightened, and then nurse brought me a looking-glass and the face I saw was so strange! Oh, it was so lonely without even myself! And then nurse said it was my hair. She said it sometimes happened when people have had a great shock or been very ill and so—I

made her cut it off. She did n't want to—it was n't her fault—I made her do it."

"But what had happened to your hair?"

"It had turned quite white, most of it." The girl shuddered. "Oh, it was horrid! I am sure you would not have liked it."

Cyril, looking into her limpid eyes, felt his sudden suspicions unworthy of him.

"You must grow a nice new crop of black curls, if you want to appease me," he answered.

"Oh, do you like black hair?" Her disappointment was obvious.

"Yes, don't you? Your hair was black before your illness."

"I know it was—but I hate it! At all events, as long as I must wear a wig, I should like to have a nice yellow one; nurse tells me I can get them quite easily."

"Dear me! But I don't think a wig nice at all."

"Don't you?" Her mouth drooped at the corners. She seemed on the verge of tears.

What an extraordinary child! he thought. But she must n't cry—anything rather than that.

"My dear, if you want a wig, you shall have

one immediately. Tell your nurse to send to the nearest hairdresser for an assortment from which you can make your choice."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she cried, clapping her hands. Her hands! Cyril had forgotten them for the moment, and it was through them that he had hoped to establish her identity. He looked at them searchingly. No ring encircled the wedding finger, nor did it show the depression which the constant wearing of one invariably leaves. The girl was evidently unmarried. Those long, slender, well-kept hands certainly did not look as if they could belong to a servant, but he reflected that a seamstress' work was not of a nature to spoil them. Only the forefinger of her left hand would probably bear traces of needle pricks. He leaned eagerly forward.

"What are you looking at?" she asked.

"At your hands, my dear," he tried to speak lightly.

"What is the matter with them?" She held them out for his inspection. Yes, it was as he had expected—her forefinger was rough. She was Priscilla Prentice. Everything had fore-

warned him of this conclusion, yet in his heart of hearts he had not believed it possible till this moment.

"Don't you like my hands?" she asked, as she regarded them with anxious scrutiny, evidently trying to discover why they failed to find favour in the sight of her lord.

"They are—" He checked himself; he had almost added—the prettiest hands in the world; but he must n't say such things to her, not under the circumstances. "They are very pretty, only you have sewn so much that you have quite spoiled one little finger."

"Sewn?" She seemed struck with the idea. "Sew? I should like to sew. I know I can."

Further proof of her identity, if he needed it.

"Well, you must get nurse to find you something on which to exercise your talents—only you must be careful not to prick yourself so much in future."

"I will try, husband," she answered meekly, as she gazed solemnly at the offending finger.

There was a pause.

"Do tell me something about my past life,"

said she. "I have been lying here wondering and wondering."

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything. In the first place, are my parents living? Oh, I hope so!"

Here was a poser. Cyril had no idea whether her parents were alive or not, but even if they were, it would be impossible to communicate with them for the present, so he had better set her mind at rest by denying their existence.

"No, my dear, you are an orphan, and you have neither brothers nor sisters," he added hastily. It was just as well to put a final stop to questions as to her family.

"Nobody of my own—nobody?"

"Nobody," he reiterated, but he felt like a brute.

"Have I any children?" was her next question.

Cyril started perceptibly.

"No, no, certainly not," he was so embarrassed that he spoke quite sharply.

"Oh, are you glad?" She stared at him in amazement and to his disgust Cyril felt himself turning crimson.

"Now I 'm sorry," she continued with a soft

sigh. "I wish I had a baby. I remember about babies."

"I—I like them, too," he hastened to assure her. Really this was worse than he had expected.

"How long have we been married?" she demanded.

"I have been married four years," he truthfully answered, hoping that that statement would satisfy her.

"Fancy! We have been living together for four years! Is n't it awful that I can only remember you the very weeist little bit! But I will love, honour, and obey you—now that I know—I will indeed."

"I am sure you will always do what is right," said Cyril with a sudden tightening of his throat. She looked so young, so innocent, so serious. Oh, if only——

"Bah, don't waste too much love on me. I 'm an unworthy beggar," he said aloud.

"You are an unworthy husband? Oh!" She opened her eyes wide and stared at him in consternation. "But it does n't say anything in the prayer-book about not loving unworthy

husbands. I don't believe it makes any difference to the vow before God. Besides you don't look unworthy—are you sure you are?" she pleaded.

Cyril's eyes fell before her agonised gaze.

"I 'll try to be worthy of you," he stammered.

"Worthy of me?" she cried with a gay, little laugh. "I 'm too silly and stupid now to be anything but a burden—I quite realise that—but the doctor thinks I will get better and in the meantime I will try to please you and do my duty."

Poor baby, thought Cyril, the marriage vows she imagined she had taken seemed to weigh dreadfully on her conscience. Oh, if he could only undeceive her!

A discreet knock sounded at the door.

The nurse made her appearance.

"The doctor thinks Mrs. Thompkins has talked enough for the present," she said.

Cyril rose with a curious mixture of relief and reluctance.

"Well, this must be good-bye for to-day," he said, taking her small hand in his.

She lifted up her face—simply as a child might

have done. Slowly he leaned nearer to her, his heart was pounding furiously; the blood rushed to his temples.

Suddenly he started back! He must not—he dare not——!

For a moment he crushed her fingers to his lips; then turning abruptly, he strode towards the door.

"You 'll come to-morrow, won't you?" she cried.

"Yes, to-morrow," he answered.

"Early?"

"As early as I can."

"Good-bye, husband. I will be so lonely without you," she called after him, but he resolutely closed the door.

At the foot of the stairs a nurse was waiting for him.

"The doctor would like to speak to you for a moment," she said as she led the way to the consulting-room.

"Well, how did you find Lady Wilmersley's memory; were you able to help her in any way to recall the past," inquired the doctor.

Cyril was too preoccupied to notice that the

other's manner was several degrees colder than it had been on his arrival.

"I fear not." Cyril felt guiltily conscious that he was prevaricating.

"You astonish me. I confess I am disappointed. Yes, very much so. But it will come back to her—I am sure it will."

"I say, doctor, how long do you think my wife will have to remain here?"

"No longer than she wishes to. She could be moved to-morrow, if necessary, but I advise waiting till the day after."

"You are sure it won't hurt her?" insisted Cyril anxiously.

"Quite. In fact, the sooner Lady Wilmersley resumes her normal life the better."

"How soon will I be able to talk freely to her?" Cyril asked.

"That depends largely on how she progresses, but not before a month at the earliest. By the way, Lord Wilmersley, I want you to take charge of Lady Wilmersley's bag. The contents were too valuable to be left about; so after taking out her toilet articles, the nurse brought it to me."

"Ah! and—and what was in the bag?" asked Cyril fearfully.

"Lady Wilmersley's jewels, of course."

Jewels! This was terrible. If they were those belonging to his cousin, their description had been published in every paper in the kingdom. It was a miracle that Smith had not recognised them.

"Of course," Cyril managed to stammer.

The doctor went to a safe and taking out a cheap, black bag handed it to Cyril.

"I should like you, please, to see if they are all there," he said.

"That is n't the least necessary," Cyril hastened to assure him.

"You would greatly oblige me by doing so."

"I 'm quite sure they are all right; besides if any are missing, they were probably stolen in Paris," said Cyril.

"But I insist." Stuart-Smith was nothing if not persistent. His keen eyes had noted Cyril's agitation and his reluctance to open the bag made the doctor all the more determined to force him to do so.

But Cyril was too quick for him. Seizing the bag, he made for the door.

"I 'll come back to-morrow," he cried over his shoulder, as he hurried unceremoniously out of the room and out of the house.

A disreputable-looking man stood at the door of his waiting taxi and obsequiously opened it. Shouting his address to the driver, Cyril flung himself into the car and waved the beggar impatiently away.

No sooner were they in motion than Cyril hastened to open the bag. A brown paper parcel lay at the bottom of it. He undid the string with trembling fingers. Yes, it was as he feared —a part, if not all, of the Wilmersley jewels lay before him.

"Give me a penny, for the love of Gawd," begged a hoarse voice at his elbow. The beggar was still clinging to the step and his villainous face was within a foot of the jewels.

Cyril felt himself grow cold with apprehension. The fellow knew who he was, and followed him. He was a detective!

"A gen'lman like you could well spare a poor man a penny," the fellow whined, but there was

a note of menace in his voice. Cyril tried to get a good look at him, but the light was too dim for him to distinguish his features clearly.

Hastily covering the jewels, Cyril thrust a coin into the grimy hand.

"Go!" he commanded, "go, or I'll call the police."

The man sank out of sight.

"My poor little girl, my poor little girl," murmured Cyril disconsolately, as he glanced once more at the incriminating jewels.

CHAPTER X

THE TWO FRENCHMEN

"You must be mad, Cyril! No sane man could have got into such a mess!" cried Guy Campbell, excitedly pounding his fat knee with his podgy hand.

Cyril had been so disturbed by the finding of the Wilmersley jewels that he had at last decided that he must confide his troubles to some one. He realised that the time had come when he needed not only advice but assistance. He was now so convinced that he was being watched that he had fled to his club for safety. There, at all events, he felt comparatively safe from prying eyes, and it was there in a secluded corner that he poured his tale of woe into his friend's astonished ears.

"You must be mad," the latter repeated.

"If that is all you can find to say, I am sorry I told you," exclaimed Cyril irritably.

"It 's a jolly good thing you did! Why, you are no more fit to take care of yourself than a new-born baby." Guy's chubby face expressed such genuine concern that Cyril relaxed a little.

"Perhaps I 've been a bit of an ass, but really I don't see what else I could have done."

"No, don't suppose you do," said Guy, regarding Cyril with pitying admiration.

"Oh, don't rub it in! The question now is not what I ought to have done, but what am I to do now?"

"What do you intend to do?"

"I have n't the slightest idea. I want your advice."

"Oh, no, you don't! Why, you would n't even listen to a sensible suggestion."

"What do you call a sensible suggestion?" Cyril cautiously inquired.

"To get the girl out of the nursing home and lose her. And it ought to be done P. D. Q., as the Americans say."

"I shall certainly do nothing of the sort."

"Exactly," cried Campbell triumphantly. "I know you, Lord Quixote; you have some crazy plan in your head. Out with it."

"I have n't a plan, I tell you. Now as I am being followed——"

"I can't believe you are," interrupted Guy.

"I feel sure that that beggar I told you about was a detective."

"Why?"

"He was evidently waiting for me and I could n't shake him off till he had had a good look at the jewels."

"It is much more likely that he was waiting for a penny than for you, and beggars are usually persistent. I see no possible reason why the police should be shadowing you. It is your guilty conscience that makes you so suspicious."

"You may be right; I certainly hope you are, but till I am sure of it, I don't dare to run the risk of being seen with Miss Prentice. As she is in no condition to go about alone, I have been worrying a good deal as to how to get her out of the Home; so I thought—it occurred to me—that—you are the person to do it."

"Thanks, awfully! So you leave me the pleasant task of running off with a servant-girl who is "wanted" by the police! You are really too unselfish!"

"Miss Prentice is a lady," Cyril angrily asserted.

"H'm," Campbell ejaculated skeptically. "That she is a beauty I do not doubt, and she has certainly played her cards very skilfully."

"Don't you dare to speak of her like that," cried Cyril, clenching his fists and half starting to his feet.

"By Jove, old man! You're smitten with her," exclaimed Campbell, staring aghast at his friend.

Cyril flushed darkly under his tan.

"Certainly not, but I have the greatest respect for this unfortunate young woman, and don't you forget it again."

Campbell smiled incredulously.

"Oh, very well! Believe what you like, but I did n't think you were the sort of man who never credits a fellow with disinterested motives, if he behaves half-way decently to a woman."

"Steady now, Cyril. Don't let's quarrel. You must n't take offence so easily. I have never seen the young lady, remember. And you know I will help you even against my better judgment."

"You 're a good chap, Guy."

"Thanks! Now let us first of all consider Miss Prentice's case dispassionately. I want to be sure of my facts; then I may be able to form some conjecture as to why Wilmersley was murdered and how the jewels came into Miss Prentice's possession. You tell me that it has been proved that she really left Geralton on the afternoon before the murder?"

"Yes; the carrier swears he drove her into Newhaven and put her down near the station. Further than that they have luckily not been able to trace her."

"Now your idea is that Miss Prentice, having in some way managed to secure a car, returned to Geralton that evening and got into the castle through the library window?"

"No, I doubt if she entered the castle. I can think of no reason why she should have done so," said Cyril.

"In that case, how do you account for her injuries? Who could have flogged her except your charming cousin?"

"I had n't thought of that!" exclaimed Cyril.

"Granting that she is Priscilla Prentice, the

only hypothesis I can think of which explains her predicament is this: Having planned to rescue her mistress, she was only waiting for a favourable opportunity to present itself. The doctor's visit determined her to act at once. I agree with you that to re-enter Geralton was not her original intention, but while waiting under the library window for Lady Wilmersley to join her, she hears Wilmersley ill-treating his wife, so she climbs in and rushes to the latter's assistance."

"Yes, yes," assented Cyril with shining eyes.

"But she is overpowered by Wilmersley," continued Campbell, warming to his theme, "who, insane with rage, flogs her unmercifully. Then Lady Wilmersley, fearing the girl will be killed, seizes the pistol, which is lying on the desk, and fires at her husband——"

"I am convinced that that is just what happened," cried Cyril.

"Don't be too sure of it; still, it seems to me that that theory hangs together pretty well," Campbell complacently agreed. "Of course, neither woman contemplated murder. Wilmersley's death completely unnerved them. If the

gardener's wife heard a cry coming from the car, it is possible that one or the other had an attack of hysterics. Now about the jewels—I believe Miss Prentice took charge of them, either because Lady Wilmersley was unfit to assume such a responsibility or because they agreed that she could the more easily dispose of them. I think that Miss Prentice's hurried trip to town was undertaken not in order to avoid arrest, but primarily to raise money, of which they must have had great need, and possibly also to rejoin her mistress, who, now that we know that she made her escape in a car, is probably hiding somewhere either in London itself or in its vicinity."

"Guy, you are a wonder. You have thought of everything," cried Cyril admiringly.

"Of course, I may be quite wrong. These are only suppositions, remember," Campbell modestly reminded him. "By the way, what have you done with the jewels? I can't believe that you are in any danger of arrest, but if there is the remotest chance of such a thing, it would n't look very well if they were found in your possession."

"I had thought of that. I was even afraid that my rooms might be searched in my absence, so I took them with me."

"They are here?"

"Yes, in my pocket. I have hidden the bag and to-night I mean to burn it."

"Your pocket is not a very safe repository."

"Exactly. That is why I want you to take charge of them," said Cyril.

"Oh, very well," sighed Campbell, with mock resignation. "In for a penny, in for a pound. I shall probably end by being arrested as a receiver of stolen property! But now we must consider what we had better do with Miss Prentice."

"I think I shall hire a cottage in the country for her."

"If you did that, the police would find her immediately. The only safe hiding-place is a crowd."

"You think so?" Cyril looked doubtful.

"I am sure of it. Now let me see: Where is she least likely to attract attention? It must be a place where you could manage to see her without being compromised, and, if possible,

without being observed. I have it! A hotel. The Hotel George is the very place. In a huge caravansary like that all sorts and conditions of people jostle each other without exciting comment. Besides, the police are less likely to look among the guests of such an expensive hotel for a poor maid servant or in such a public resort for a fugitive from justice."

"You are right!" cried Cyril enthusiastically.

"But in her present condition," continued Campbell, "I don't see how she could remain there alone."

"Certainly not. She must have some woman with her."

"Exactly. But what trustworthy woman could you get to undertake such a task? Perhaps one of the nurses——"

"No," Cyril hastily interrupted him. "When she leaves the nursing home, all trace of her must be lost. At any moment the police may discover that a woman whom I have represented to be my wife has been a patient there. That will naturally arouse their suspicions and they will do their utmost to discover who it is that I am protecting with my name. No, a nurse

would never do. For one thing, she would feel called upon to report to the doctor."

"You might bribe her not to do so," suggested Guy.

"I should n't dare to trust to an absolutely unknown quantity. Oh, if I only knew a respectable woman on whom I could rely! I would pay her a small fortune for her services."

"I know somebody who might do," said Campbell. "Her name is Miss Trevor and she used to be my sister's governess. She is too old to teach now and I fancy has a hard time to make both ends meet. The only trouble is that she is so conscientious that she would rather starve than be mixed up in anything she did not consider perfectly honourable and above board. If I told her that she was to chaperon a young lady whom the police were looking for, she would be so indignant that I doubt if she would ever speak to me again."

"Why tell her?" insinuated Cyril.

"It does n't seem decent to inveigle her by false representations into taking a position which she would never dream of accepting if she knew the truth."

"I will pay her £200 a year as long as she lives, if she will look after Miss Prentice till this trouble is over. Even if the worst happens and the girl is discovered, she can truthfully plead ignorance of the latter's identity," urged Cyril.

"True, and two hundred a year is good pay even for unpleasant notoriety. Yes, on the whole I think I am justified in accepting the offer for her. But now we must consider what fairy tale we are going to concoct for her benefit."

"Oh, I don't know," sighed Cyril wearily.

"Imagination giving out, or conscience awakening—which is it?" asked Guy.

"Don't chaff!"

"Sorry, old man; but joking aside, we must really decide what we are to tell Miss Trevor. You can no longer pose as Miss Prentice's husband——"

"Why not?" interrupted Cyril sharply.

"What possible excuse have you for doing so, now that she is to leave the doctor's care?"

"I am sure it would have a very bad effect on Miss Prentice's health, if I were to tell her that she is not my wife."

"H'm, h'm!" Campbell regarded his friend quizzically.

"Remember, she is completely cut off from the past," urged Cyril; "she has neither friend nor relation to cling to. I am the one person in the world she believes she has a claim on. I can't undeceive her. Besides, the doctor's orders are that she shall not be in any way agitated."

"Well, that settles that question. Now what explanation will you give Miss Trevor for not living with your wife?"

"I shall say that her state of health renders it inadvisable for the present."

"What shall she be called?" asked Campbell.

"I think we had better stick to Thompkins. She is accustomed to that. Only we will spell it Tomkyns and change the Christian name to John."

"But won't she confide what she believes to be her real name to Miss Trevor?" asked Guy anxiously.

"I think not—not if I tell her I don't wish her to do so. She has a great idea of wifely obedience, I assure you."

"Well," laughed Guy, "that is a virtue which so few real wives possess that it seems a pity it should be wasted on a temporary one. And now, Cyril, we must decide on the best way and the best time for transferring Miss Prentice to the hotel."

"Unless something unexpected occurs to change our plans, I think she had better be moved the day after to-morrow. I advise your starting as early as possible before the world is well awake. But I leave all details to you. You are quite capable of managing the situation. Only be sure you are not followed, that is all I ask."

"I don't expect we shall be, but if we are, I think I can promise to outwit them," Campbell assured him.

"I shall never forget what you are doing for me, Guy."

"You had better not. I expect you to erect a monument commemorating my virtues and my folly. Now I must be off. Where are those stolen goods of which I am to become the custodian?"

"Here they are. I have done them up in

several parcels, so that they are not too bulky to carry. As I don't want the police to know how intimate we are, it is better that we should not be seen together in public for the present."

"I think you are over-cautious. But perhaps," agreed Campbell, "we might as well meet here till all danger is over."

A few minutes later Cyril also left the club. His talk with Campbell had been a great relief to him. As he walked briskly along, he felt calm—almost cheerful.

"Is n't this Lord Wilmersley?" inquired a deep voice at his elbow.

Turning quickly Cyril recognised Inspector Griggs.

For a moment Cyril was too startled to speak. Then, pulling himself together, he exclaimed with an attempt at heartiness:

"Why, Inspector! I thought you were in Newhaven. What has brought you to town?"

"I only left Newhaven this afternoon, but I think my work there is finished—for the present at least."

"Really? Have you already solved the mystery?"

"No indeed, but the clue now leads away from Geralton."

"Clue? What clue?" Cyril found it difficult to control the tremor in his voice.

"If you 'll excuse me, my lord, I had better keep my suppositions to myself till I am able to verify them."

The man suspected him! But why? What had he discovered? Cyril felt he could not let him go before he had ascertained exactly what he had to fear. It was so awful, this fighting in the dark.

"If you have half an hour to spare, come to my rooms. They are only a few doors away." Cyril was convinced that the Inspector knew where he was staying and had been lying in wait for him. He thought it best to pretend that he felt above suspicion.

"Thank you, my lord."

A few minutes later they were sitting before a blazing fire, the Inspector puffing luxuriously at a cigar and sipping from time to time a glass of whiskey and soda which Peter had reluctantly placed at his elbow. Peter, as he himself would have put it, "did not hold with the

police," and thought his master was sadly demeaning himself by fraternising with a member of that calling.

"I quite understand your reluctance to talk about a case," said Cyril, reverting at once to the subject he had in mind; "but as this one so nearly concerns my family and consequently myself, I think I have a right to your confidence. I am most anxious to know what you have discovered. This mystery is weighing on me. I assure you, you can rely on my discretion."

"Well, my lord, it 's a bit unprofessional, but seeing it 's you, I don't mind if I do. It 's the newspaper men, I am afraid of."

"I shall not mention what you tell me to any one except possibly to one friend," Cyril hastily assured him.

"Thank you, my lord. You see I may be all wrong, so I don't want to say too much till I can prove my case."

"I understand that," said Cyril; "and this clue that you are following—what is it?" he inquired with breathless impatience.

"The car, my lord," answered the Inspector, settling himself deeper in his chair, while his

eyes began to gleam with suppressed excitement.

"You have found the car in which her ladyship made her escape?"

"I don't know about that yet, but I have found the car that stood at the foot of the long lane on the night of the murder."

"Remarkable!"

"Oh, that's not so very wonderful," protested the Inspector with an attempt at modesty, but he was evidently bursting with pride in his achievement.

"How did you do it? What had you to go on?" asked Cyril with genuine amazement.

"I began my search by trying to find out what cars had been seen in the neighbourhood of Geralton on the night of the murder—by neighbourhood I mean a radius of twenty-five miles. I found, as I expected, that half-past eleven not being a favourite hour for motoring, comparatively few had been seen or heard. Most of these turned out to be the property of gentlemen who had no difficulty in proving that they had been used only for perfectly legitimate purposes. There remained, however, two cars of which I

failed to get a satisfactory account. One belongs to a Mr. Benedict, a young man who owns a place about ten miles from Geralton, and who seems to have spent the evening motoring wildly over the country. He pretends he had no particular object, and as he is a bit queer, it may be true. The other car is the property of the landlord of the Red Lion Inn, a very respectable hotel in Newhaven. I then sent two of my men to examine these cars and report if either of them has a new tire, for the gardener's wife swore that the car she heard had burst one. Mr. Benedict's tires all showed signs of wear, but the Red Lion car has a brand new one!"

"Bravo! That is a fine piece of work."

"Oh, that is nothing," replied the Inspector, vainly trying to suppress a self-satisfied smile.

"Did you find any further evidence against this hotel-keeper? What connection had he with the castle?" inquired Cyril.

"He knew Lord Wilmersley slightly, but says he has never even seen her Ladyship. And I am inclined to believe him."

"In that case what part does he play in the affair?"

"None, I fancy. You see he keeps the car for the convenience of his guests and on the day in question it had been hired by two young Frenchmen, who were out in it from two o'clock till midnight."

"Frenchmen! But how could they have had anything to do with the tragedy?"

"That remains to be seen. So far all I have been able to find out about these two men is that they landed in Newhaven ten days before the murder. They professed to be brothers and called themselves Joseph and Paul Durand. They seemed to be amply provided with money and wanted the best the hotel had to offer. Joseph Durand appeared a decent sort of fellow, but the younger one drank. The waiters fancy that the elder man used to remonstrate with him occasionally, but the youngster paid very little attention to him."

"You say they *professed* to be brothers. Why do you doubt their relationship?"

"For one reason, the elder one did not understand a word of English, while the young one spoke it quite easily, although with a strong accent. That is, he spoke it with a strong ac-

cent when he was sober, but when under the influence of liquor this accent disappeared.

"And what has become of the pair?"

"They left Newhaven the morning after the murder. Their departure was very hurried, and the landlord is sure that the day before they had no intention of leaving."

"Where did they go to?"

"They took the boat to Dieppe. The porter saw them off."

"Have you been able to trace them farther?"

"Not yet, my lord, but I have sent one of my men to try and follow them up, and I have notified the continental police to be on the look-out for them. It 's a pity that they have three days' start of us."

"But as you have an accurate description of both, I should imagine that they will soon be found."

"It 's through the young 'un they 'll be caught, if they are caught."

"Why, is he deformed in any way?"

"No, my lord, but they tell me he is abnormally small for a man of his age, for he must be twenty-two or three at the very least.

The landlord believes that he is a jockey who had got into bad habits, and that the elder man is his trainer or backer. Of course, he may be right, but the waiters pooh-pooh the idea. They insist that the boy is a gentleman-born and servants are pretty good judges of such things, though you might n't think it, my lord."

"I can quite believe it," assented Cyril. "But then there are many gentlemen jockeys."

"So there are. I only wish I had seen the little fellow, for they all agree that there was something about him which would make it impossible for any one who had once met him ever to forget him again."

"That certainly is a most unusual quality."

"So it is, my lord. They also tell me that if his eyes had not been so bloodshot, and if he had not looked so drawn and haggard, he 'd have been an extraordinarily good-looking chap."

"Really?"

"Yes. It seems that he has large blue eyes, a fine little nose, not a bit red as you would expect, and as pretty a mouth as ever you 'd see. His hair is auburn and he wears it rather long, which I don't think he 'd do if he were a

jockey. Besides, his skin is as fine as a baby's, though its colour is a grey-white with only a spot of red in the middle of each cheek."

"He must be a queer-looking beggar!"

"That 's just it. That 's why I think we shall soon spot him."

"What did the elder Durand look like?"

"The ordinary type of Frenchman. He is about twenty-eight years old, medium height, and inclined to be stout. He has dark hair, a little thin at the temples, dark moustache, and dark eyes. His features are nondescript."

"On the night of the murder you say they returned to the hotel at about midnight?"

"Somewhere around then."

"Was their behaviour in any way noticeable?"

"The porter was so sleepy that he can't remember much about it. He had an impression that they came in arm in arm and went quietly upstairs."

"They were alone?"

"Certainly."

"But what do you think they had done with Lady Wilmersley?"

"But, my lord, you did n't expect that they

would bring her to the hotel, did you? If they were her friends, their first care would be for her safety. If they were not—well, we will have to look for another victim, that is all."

"You think that there is that possibility?" inquired Cyril eagerly.

"I do, my lord." The Inspector rose ponderously to his feet. "I must n't keep you any longer." He hesitated a moment, eyeing Cyril doubtfully. There was evidently still something he wished to say.

Cyril had also risen to his feet and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, idly wondering at the man's embarrassment.

"I trust her Ladyship has quite recovered?" the Inspector finally blurted out.

CHAPTER XI

THE INSPECTOR INTERVIEWS CYRIL

CYRIL felt the muscles of his face stiffen. He had for days been dreading some such question, yet now that it had finally come, it had found him completely unprepared. He must parry it if he could. He must fight for her till the last ditch.

But how devilishly clever of Griggs to have deferred his attack until he was able to catch his adversary off his guard! Cyril looked keenly but, he hoped, calmly at the Inspector. Their eyes met, but without the clash which Cyril had expected. The man's expression, although searching, was not hostile; in fact, there was something almost apologetic about his whole attitude. Griggs was not sure of his ground, that much was obvious. He knew something, he probably suspected more, but there was still

a chance that he might be led away from the trail.

Cyril's mind worked with feverish rapidity. He realised that it was imperative that his manner should appear perfectly natural. But how would an innocent man behave? He must first decide what his position, viewed from Griggs's standpoint, really was. He must have a definite conception of his part before he attempted to act it.

The Inspector evidently knew that a young woman, who bore Cyril's name, had been taken ill on the Newhaven train. He was no doubt also aware that she was now under the care of Dr. Stuart-Smith. But if the Inspector really believed the girl to be his wife, these facts were in no way incriminating. Yet the man smelt a rat! He must, therefore, know more of the truth. No, for if he had discovered that the girl was not Lady Wilmersley, Cyril was sure that Griggs would not have broached the subject so tentatively. What then had aroused the man's suspicions? Ah, he had it! He had told every one who inquired about his wife that she was still on the continent. Peter, also, obeying

his orders, had repeated the same story in the servants' hall. And, of course, Griggs knew that they were both lying. No wonder he was suspicious!

"She is much better, thank you. But how did you hear of her illness? I have not mentioned it to any one." Cyril flattered himself that his voice had exactly the right note of slightly displeased surprise. He watched the Inspector breathlessly. Had he said the right thing? Yes, for Griggs's expression relaxed and he answered with a smile that was almost deprecating:

"I, of course, saw the report of the man who searched the train, and I was naturally surprised to find that the only lady who had taken her ticket in Newhaven was Mrs. Cyril Crichton. In a case like this we have to verify everything, so when I discovered that the gentleman who was with her, was undoubtedly your Lordship, it puzzled me a good deal why both you and your valet should be so anxious to keep her Ladyship's presence in England a secret."

"Yes, yes, it must have astonished you, and I confess I am very sorry you found me out,"

said Cyril. He had his cue now. The old lie must be told once more. "Her Ladyship is suffering from a—a nervous affection." He hesitated purposely. "In fact—she has just left an insane asylum," he finally blurted out.

"You mean that the present Lady Wilmersley —not the Dowager—?" The Inspector was too surprised to finish his sentence.

"Yes, it's queer, isn't it, that both should be afflicted in the same way," agreed Cyril, calmly lighting a cigarette.

"Most remarkable," ejaculated Griggs, staring fixedly at Cyril.

"As the doctors believe that her Ladyship will completely recover, I didn't want any one to know that she had ever been unbalanced. But I might have known that it was bound to leak out."

"We are no gossips, my lord; I shall not mention what you have told me to any one."

"Thanks. But if the whole police department——?"

"They have got too much to do, to bother about what doesn't concern them. I don't believe a dozen of them noticed that in searching the train for one Lady Wilmersley, they had

inadvertently stumbled on another, and as the latter had nothing to do with their case, they probably dismissed the whole thing from their minds. I know them!"

"But you—" suggested Cyril.

"Well, you see, it's different with me. It's the business of my men to bring me isolated facts, but I have to take a larger view of the —the—the—ah—possibilities. I have got to think of everything—suspect every one."

"Even me?" asked Cyril quickly.

"Your Lordship would have no difficulty in proving an alibi."

"So you took the trouble to find that out?"

"Of course, my lord."

"But why? I should really like to know what could have led you to suspect me?"

"I did n't suspect you, my lord. I only thought of you. You see, Lady Wilmersley must have had an accomplice and you must acknowledge that it was a strange coincidence that your Lordship should have happened to pass through Newhaven at that particular moment, especially as the Newhaven route is not very popular with people of your means."

"Quite so. As a matter of fact, I had no intention of taking it, but I missed the Calais train."

"I see," Griggs nodded his head as if the explanation fully satisfied him. "Would you mind, my lord," he continued after a brief pause, "if, now that we are on the subject, I asked you a few questions? There are several points which are bothering me. Of course, don't answer, if you had rather not."

"You mean if my answers are likely to incriminate me. Well, I don't think they will, so fire ahead," drawled Cyril, trying to express by his manner a slight weariness of the topic.

"Thank you, my lord." Griggs looked a trifle abashed, but he persisted. "I have been wondering how it was that you met her Ladyship in Newhaven, if you had no previous intention of taking that route?"

Cyril was ready with his answer.

"It was quite accidental. The fact is, her Ladyship escaped from an asylum near Fontainebleau over a fortnight ago. I scoured France for her but finally gave up the search, and leaving the French detectives to follow up

any clue that might turn up, I decided almost on the spur of the moment to run over to England. I was never more astonished than when I found her on the train."

"Why had she gone to Newhaven?" asked Griggs.

"I have no idea."

"Nor how long she stayed there?"

"No. She was rather excited and I asked no questions."

"Had she ever before visited Newhaven to your knowledge?"

"Never."

"Then she did not know the late Lord Wilmersley?"

"No."

"Was there any reason for this?" inquired the detective, looking keenly at Cyril.

"I was never very friendly with my cousin, and we sailed for South Africa immediately after our marriage. Neither of us has been home since then."

"I must find out where she spent the night of the murder," murmured the Inspector. He seemed to have forgotten Cyril's presence.

"If you think her Ladyship had anything to do with the tragedy, I assure you, you are on the wrong track," cried Cyril, forgetting for a moment his pose of polite aloofness. "She has never been at all violent. It is chiefly her memory that is affected. Until the last few days what she did one minute, she forgot the next."

"You think, therefore, that she would not be able to tell me how she spent her time in Newhaven?"

"I am sure of it."

"That is most unfortunate! By the way, how has she taken the news of Lord Wilmersley's murder?"

"She has not been told of it. She does not even know that he is dead."

"Ah!"

"I see I must explain her case more fully, so that you may be able to understand my position. Her Ladyship's mind became affected about six months ago, owing to causes into which I need not enter now. Since her arrival in England her improvement has been very rapid. Her memory is growing stronger, but it is essential

that it should not be taxed for the present. The doctor assures me that if she is kept perfectly quiet for a month or so, she will recover completely. That is why I want her to remain in absolute seclusion. An incautious word might send her off her balance. She must be protected from people, and I will protect her, I warn you of that. Six weeks from now, if all goes well, you can cross-question her, if you still think it necessary, but at present I not only forbid it, but I will do all in my power to prevent it. Of course," continued Cyril more calmly, "I have neither the power nor the desire to hamper you in the exercise of your profession; so if you doubt my statements just ask Dr. Stuart-Smith whether he thinks her Ladyship has ever been in a condition when she might have committed murder. He will laugh at you, I am sure."

"I don't doubt it, my lord; all the same—" Griggs hesitated.

"All the same you would like to know what her Ladyship did on the night of the murder. Well, find out, if you can. I assure you that although our motives differ, my curiosity equals yours."

"Thank you, my lord. I shall certainly do my best to solve the riddle," said the Inspector as he bowed himself out.

Cyril sank wearily into a chair. The interview had been a great strain, and yet he felt that in a way it had been a relief also. He flattered himself that he had played his cards rather adroitly. For now that he had found out exactly how much the police knew, he might possibly circumvent them. Of course, it was merely a question of days, perhaps even of hours, before Griggs would discover that the girl was not his wife; for the Inspector was nothing if not thorough and if he once began searching Newhaven for evidence of her stay there, Cyril was sure that it would not take him long to establish her identity. Oh! If he only had Griggs fighting on his side, instead of the little pompous fool of a Judson! By the way, what could have become of Judson? It was now two full days since he had left Geralton. He certainly ought to have reported himself long before this. Well, it made no difference one way or the other. He was a negligible quantity. Cyril had no time to think of him now. His

immediate concern was to find a way by which Priscilla could be surreptitiously removed from the nursing home, before the police had time to collect sufficient evidence to warrant her arrest. But how was it to be done? Cyril sat for half an hour staring at the smouldering fire before he was able to hit on a plan that seemed to him at all feasible.

Going to the writing-table, he rapidly covered three sheets and thrust them into an envelope.

"Peter," he called.

"Yes, sir," answered a sleepy voice.

"You are to take this letter at half-past seven o'clock to-morrow morning to Mr. Campbell's rooms and give it into his own hands. If he is still asleep, wake him up. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Very well. You can go to bed now——"

It was lucky, thought Cyril, that he had taken Guy into his confidence. He was a good chap, Guy was! How he must hate the whole business! For, notwithstanding his careless manner, he was *au fond* a conventional soul. It was really comical to think of that impeccable person as a receiver of stolen property. What

would he do with the jewels, Cyril wondered. Ah, that reminded him of the bag. He must get rid of it at once. Poking the fire into a blaze, he cautiously locked the two doors which connected his rooms with the rest of the house. Then, having assured himself that the blinds were carefully drawn and that no one was secreted about the premises, he knelt down before the empty fireplace in his bedroom and felt up the chimney.

The bag was no longer there!

CHAPTER XII

A PERILOUS VENTURE

IN the grey dawn of the following morning Cyril was already up and dressed. The first thing he did was to detach two of the labels affixed to his box and place them carefully in his pocketbook. That accomplished, he had to wait with what patience he could muster until Peter returned with Campbell's reply. Cyril perused it eagerly. It was evidently satisfactory, for he heaved a sigh of relief as he sat down to breakfast. His eyes, however, never left the clock and it had hardly finished striking nine before our hero was out of the house. No suspicious person was in sight, but Cyril, was determined to take no chances. He therefore walked quickly ahead, then turned so abruptly that he would necessarily have surprised any one who was following him. This he did many times till he

reached Piccadilly Circus, where, with a last look behind him, he bolted into a shop. There he asked for a small travelling box suitable for a lady. Having chosen one, he took his labels out of his pocket.

"Have these pasted on the box," he ordered.

The man's face expressed such amazement that Cyril hastened to remark that the box was intended for a bride who did not wish to be identified as such by the newness of her baggage. A comprehending and sympathetic smile proved that the explanation was satisfactory. A few minutes later Cyril drove off with his new acquisition. The next purchase was a handsomely-fitted lady's dressing-bag, which he took to Trufitt's and filled with such toilet accessories as a much-befrizzled young person designated as indispensable to a lady's comfort. On leaving there he stopped for a moment at his bank.

Cyril now metaphorically girded his loins and summoning up all his courage, plunged into a shop in Bond Street, where he remembered his mother used to get what she vaguely termed "her things." Among the maze of frou-frous he stood

in helpless bewilderment, till an obsequious floor-walker came to his rescue. Cyril explained that he had a box outside which he wanted to fill then and there with a complete outfit for a young lady. To his relief the man showed no surprise at so unusual a request and he was soon ensconced in the blessed seclusion of a fitting room. There the box was hurriedly packed with a varied assortment of apparel, which he devoutly prayed would meet with Priscilla's approval. It was not half-past eleven. The doctor must have left the nursing home by this time, thought Cyril.

Not wishing to attract attention by driving up to the door, he told the chauffeur to stop when they were still at some distance away from it. There he got out and looked anxiously about him. To his relief he recognised Campbell's crimson pate hovering in the distance. So far, thought Cyril triumphantly, there had been no hitch in his carefully-laid plans.

"You are to wait here," he said, turning to the driver, "for a lady and a red-haired gentleman. Now understand, no one but a red-haired man is to enter this car. Here is a pound, and

if you don't make a mess of things, the other gentleman will give you two more."

"All right, sir; thank you, sir," exclaimed the astonished chauffeur, greedily pocketing the gold piece.

Cyril was certain that he had not been followed, and there was no sign that the nursing home was being watched, but that did not reassure him. Those curtained windows opposite might conceal a hundred prying eyes.

When he was ushered into Miss Prentice's room, he was surprised to find her already up and dressed. She held a mirror in one hand and with the other was arranging a yellow wig, which encircled her face like an aureole. Cyril could hardly restrain a cry of admiration. He had thought her lovely before, but now her beauty was absolutely startling.

On catching sight of him she dropped the mirror and ran to him with outstretched hands.

"Oh! I am so glad you have come. How do you like my hair?" she exclaimed all in one breath.

Cyril heroically disengaged himself from her soft, clinging clasp and not daring to allow his

eyes to linger on her upturned face, he surveyed the article in question judicially.

"For a wig it's not bad. I can't say, however, that I like anything artificial," he asserted mendaciously.

"You prefer my own hair!" she cried, and the corners of her mouth began to droop in a way he had already begun to dread. "Oh! what shall I do? Nurse tells me it will take ages and ages for it to grow again."

"There, there, my dear, it's all right. You look lovely—" he paused abruptly.

"Oh, do I?" she cried, beaming with delight. "I am so glad you think so!"

"It does n't matter what I think."

"But it does," she insisted.

Cyril turned resolutely away. This sort of thing must stop, he determined.

"I would like to ask you one thing," She hesitated a moment. "Are we very poor?"

"No, why?"

"Then I could afford to have some pretty clothes?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, I 'm so glad! I can't bear the ones I

have on. I can't think why I ever bought anything so ugly. I shall throw them away as soon as I can get others. By the way, where is my box? Nurse tells me that I arrived here with nothing but a small hand-bag."

"It has gone astray," he stammered. "It will turn up soon, no doubt, but in the meantime I have bought a few clothes for your immediate use."

"Oh, have you? Where are they?" she cried, clapping her hands.

Now was the crucial moment. He must introduce the subject of her departure tactfully.

"They are outside in a cab."

She ran to the window.

"But I see no cab."

"It is waiting a little farther down the street."

She looked bewildered.

"Farther down—why?"

"You trust me, don't you?" he said, looking earnestly at her.

"Yes, of course."

"Then, believe me, it is necessary for you to leave this place immediately. I—you—are be-

ing pursued by some one who—who wishes to separate us."

"Oh, no, not that!" she cried. "But how can any one separate us, when God has joined us together?"

"It's a long story and I have no time to explain it now. All I ask is that you will trust me blindly for the present, and do exactly what I tell you to."

"I will," she murmured submissively.

"Thank you. Will you please call your nurse?"

She touched a bell.

The same middle-aged woman appeared of whom he had caught a glimpse on his former visit.

"Good-morning, nurse. Your patient seems pretty fit to-day."

"Mrs. Thompkins is recovering very rapidly."

"Can I speak to the doctor?" asked Cyril.

"I am sorry, but he has just left."

"Too bad!" Cyril knitted his brows as if the doctor's absence was an unexpected disappointment. "Mrs. Thompkins must leave here at once and I wanted to explain her precipitate departure to him."

"You might telephone," suggested the nurse.

"Yes, or better still, I shall call at his office. But his absence places me in a most awkward predicament."

Cyril paced the room several times as if in deep thought, then halted before the nurse.

"Well, there is no help for it. As the doctor is not here, I must confide in you. Thompkins is not our real name. The doctor knows what that is and it was on his advice that we discarded it for the time being. I can't tell you our reason for this concealment nor why my wife must not only leave this house as soon as possible, but must do so unobserved. Will you help us?"

"I—I don't know, sir," answered the nurse dubiously, staring at Cyril in amazement.

"If you will dress my wife in a nurse's uniform and see that she gets out of here without being recognised, I will give you £100. Here is the money."

The nurse gave a gasp and backed away from the notes, which Cyril held temptingly toward her.

"Oh, I could n't, sir, really I could n't. The

doctor would never forgive me. Besides it seems so queer."

"I promise you on my word of honour that the doctor need never know that you helped us."

But the woman only shook her head.

"What makes you hesitate?" continued Cyril. "Do you think I am trying to bribe you to do something dishonourable? Ah, that is it, is it?" He gave a short laugh. "Look at my wife, does she look like a criminal, I ask you?"

"She certainly does n't," answered the nurse, glancing eagerly from one to the other and then longingly down at the money in Cyril's hand.

"Well, then, why not trust your instinct in the matter? My wife and I have been placed, through no fault of our own, in a very disagreeable position. You will know the whole story some day, but for the present my lips are sealed. International complications might arise if the truth leaked out prematurely." Cyril felt that the last was a neat touch, for the woman's face cleared and she repeated in an awe-struck voice: "International complications!"

"Germany! I can say no more," added Cyril in a stage whisper.

"Ah! The wretches!" cried the nurse. "One never knows what they will be at next. Of course I will help you. I ought to have known at once that it was sure to be all right. Any one can see that you are a gentleman—a soldier, I dare say?"

"Never mind who or what I am. It is better that you should be able truthfully to plead your complete ignorance. Now as to the uniform; have you one to spare?"

"Yes, indeed. I will go and get it immediately."

"All this mystery frightens me," exclaimed Priscilla as soon as they were alone.

"You must be brave. Now listen attentively to what I am saying. On leaving here——"

"Oh, are n't you going with me?" she asked.

"No, we must not be seen together, but I will join you later."

"You will not leave me alone again?"

"Not for long."

"Promise."

"I promise."

"Very well, now tell me what I am to do."

"On leaving this house you are to turn to

your right and walk down the street till you see a taxi with a box on it. A friend of mine, Guy Campbell, will be inside. You can easily recognise him; he has red hair. Campbell will drive you to a hotel where a lady is waiting for you and where you are to stay till I can join you. If there should be any hitch in these arrangements, go to this address and send a telegram to me at the club. I have written all this down," he said, handing her a folded paper.

The nurse returned with her arms full of clothes.

"Have you a thick veil?" asked Cyril.

"There is a long one attached to the bonnet, but we never pull it over our faces, and I am afraid if Mrs. Thompkins did so, it would attract attention."

"Yet something must be done to conceal her face."

The nurse thought for a moment.

"Leave that to me, sir. I used to help in private theatricals once upon a time."

"That is splendid! I will go downstairs now and wait till you have got Mrs. Thompkins ready."

"Give me a quarter of an hour and you will be astonished at the result." She seemed to have thrown her whole heart into the business.

When Cyril returned, he found Priscilla really transformed. Her yellow curls had been plastered down on either side of her forehead. A pair of tinted spectacles dimmed the brilliancy of her eyes and her dark, finely-arched eyebrows had been rendered almost imperceptible by a skilful application of grease and powder. With a burnt match the nurse had drawn a few faint lines in the girlish face, so that she looked at least ten years older, and all this artifice was made to appear natural by means of a dingy, black net veil. A nurse's costume completed the disguise.

"You have done wonders, nurse. I can't thank you enough," he exclaimed.

"Don't I look a fright?" cried Priscilla a little ruefully.

"No, you don't. That is just where the art comes in. You are not noticeable one way or the other. It is admirable. And now you had better be going."

The nurse peered into the hall.

"There is no one about just now. I will take Mrs. Thompkins to the front door. If we are seen, it will be supposed that she is some friend of mine who has been calling on me. I will watch till I see her safely in the car," the nurse assured him.

"Thanks."

"By the way, as I have to pretend not to know of my patient's departure, I had better not return till you have left."

"All right. Good-bye, nurse. I shall stay here a quarter of an hour so as to give you a good start. Good-bye, my dear."

The next fifteen minutes seemed to Cyril the longest he had ever spent. He did not even dare to follow Priscilla's progress from the window. Watch in hand he waited till the time was up and then made his way cautiously out of the house without, as luck would have it, encountering any one.

The taxi was no longer in sight! With a light heart Cyril walked briskly to the doctor's office.

"Well, Lord Wilmersley, what brings you here?" asked the doctor, when Cyril was finally ushered into the august presence.

"I have called to tell you that my wife has left the nursing home," Cyril blurted out.

"Impossible!" cried the doctor. "She was quite calm this morning. The nurse would——"

"The nurse had nothing to do with it," interrupted Cyril hastily. "It was I who took her away."

"You? But why this haste? I thought you had decided to wait till to-morrow."

"For family reasons, which I need not go into now, I thought it best that she should be removed at once."

"And may I know where she is?" inquired the doctor, looking searchingly at Cyril.

"I intend to take her to Geralton—in—in a few days."

"Indeed!" The doctor's upper lip lengthened perceptibly.

"So you do not wish me to know where you have hidden her."

"Hidden her?" Cyril raised his eyebrows deprecatingly. "That is a strange expression to use. It seems to me that a man has certainly the right to withhold his wife's address from a comparative stranger without being ac-

cused of hiding her. You should really choose your words more carefully, my dear sir."

The doctor glared at Cyril for a moment, then rising abruptly he paced the room several times.

"It 's no use," he said at last, stopping in front of Cyril. "You can't persuade me that there is not some mystery connected with Lady Wilmersley. And I warn you that I have determined to find out the truth."

Cyril's heart gave an uncomfortable jump, but he managed to keep his face impassive.

"A mystery? What an amusing idea! A man of your imagination is really wasted in the medical profession. You should write, my dear doctor, you really should. But, granting for the sake of argument that I have something to conceal, what right have you to try to force my confidence? My wife's movements are surely no concern of yours."

"One has not only the right, but it becomes one's obvious duty to interfere, when one has reason to believe that by doing so one may prevent the ill-treatment of a helpless woman."

"Do you really think I ill-treat my wife?"

"I think it is possible. And till I am sure

that my fears are unfounded, I will not consent to Lady Wilmersley's remaining in your sole care."

"Do you mind telling me what basis you have for such a monstrous suspicion?" asked Cyril very quietly.

"Certainly. You bring me a young lady who has been flogged. You tell me that she is your wife, yet you profess to know nothing of her injuries and give an explanation which, although not impossible, is at all events highly improbable. This lady, who is not only beautiful but charming, you neglect in the most astonishing manner. No, I am not forgetting that you had other pressing duties to attend to, but even so, if you had cared for your wife, you could not have remained away from her as you did. It was nothing less than heartless to leave a poor young woman, in the state she was in, alone among strangers. Your letter only partially satisfied me. Your arguments would have seemed to me perfectly unconvincing, if I had not been so anxious to believe the best. As it was, although I tried to ignore it, a root of suspicion still lingered in my mind. Then,

when you finally do turn up, instead of hurrying to your wife's bedside you try in every way to avoid meeting her till at last I have to insist upon your doing so. I tell you, that if she had not shown such marked affection for you, I should have had no doubt of your guilt."

"Nonsense! Do I look like a wife-beater?"

"No, but the only murderess I ever knew looked like one of Raphael's Madonnas."

"Thanks for the implication." Cyril bowed sarcastically.

"The more I observed Mrs. Thompkins," continued the doctor, "the more I became convinced that a severe shock was responsible for her amnesia, and that she had never been insane nor was she at all likely to become so."

"Even physicians are occasionally mistaken in their diagnosis, I have been told."

"You are right; that is why I have given you the benefit of the doubt," replied the doctor calmly. "This morning, however, I made a discovery, which practically proves that my suspicions were not unfounded."

"And pray what is this great discovery of yours?" drawled Cyril.

"I had been worrying about this case all night, when it suddenly occurred to me to consult the peerage. I wanted to find out who Lady Wilmersley's people were, so that I might communicate with them if I considered it necessary. The first thing I found was that your wife was born in 18—, so that now she is in her twenty-eighth year. My patient is certainly not more than twenty. How do you account for this discrepancy in their ages?"

Cyril forced himself to smile superciliously.

"And is my wife's youthful appearance your only reason for doubting her identity?"

The doctor seemed a little staggered by Cyril's nonchalant manner.

"It is my chief reason, but as I have just taken the trouble to explain, not my only one."

"Oh, really! And if she is not my wife, whom do you suspect her of being?"

"I have no idea."

"You astonish me." In trying to conceal his agitation Cyril unfortunately assumed an air of frigid detachment, which only served to exasperate the doctor still further.

"Your manner is insulting, my lord."

"Your suspicions are so flattering!" drawled Cyril.

The doctor glared at Cyril for a moment but seemed at a loss for a crushing reply.

"You must acknowledge that appearances are against you," he said at last, making a valiant effort to control his temper. "If you are a man of honour, you ought to appreciate that my position is a very difficult one and to be as ready to forgive me, if I have erred through excessive zeal, as I shall be to apologise to you. Now let me ask you one more question. Why were you so anxious that I should not see the jewels?"

"Oh, had you not seen them? I thought, of course, that you had. I apologise for not having satisfied your curiosity."

There was a short pause during which the doctor looked long and searchingly at Cyril.

"I can't help it. I feel that there is something fishy about this business. You can't convince me to the contrary."

"I was not aware that I was trying to do so."

The doctor almost danced with rage.

"Lord Wilmersley—for I suppose you are Lord Wilmersley?"

"Unless I am his valet, Peter Thompkins."

"I know nothing about you," cried the doctor, "and you have succeeded to your title under very peculiar circumstances, my lord."

"So you suspect me not only of flogging my wife but of murdering my cousin!" laughed Cyril. "My dear doctor, don't you realise that if there were the slightest grounds for your suspicions, the police would have put me under surveillance long ago. Why, I can easily prove that I was in Paris at the time of the murder."

"Oh, you are clever! I don't doubt that you have an impeccable alibi. But if I informed the police that you were passing off as your wife a girl several years younger than Lady Wilmersley, a girl, moreover, who, you acknowledged, joined you at Newhaven the very morning after the murder—if I told them that this young lady had in her possession a remarkable number of jewels, which she carried in a cheap, black bag —what do you think they would say to that, my lord?"

Cyril felt cold chills creeping down his back and the palms of his hands grew moist. Not a flicker of an eyelash, however, betrayed his

inward tumult. "They would no doubt pay as high a tribute to your imagination as I do," he answered.

Then, abandoning his careless pose, he sat up in his chair.

"You have been insulting me for the last half-hour, and I have borne it very patiently, partly because your absurd suspicions amused me, and partly because I realised that, although you are a fool, you are an honest fool."

"Sir!" The doctor turned purple in the face.

"You can hardly resent being called a fool by a man you have been accusing of murder and wife-beating. But I don't want you to go to the police with this cock-and-bull story——"

"Ah! I thought not," sneered the doctor.

"Because," continued Cyril, ignoring the interruption, "I want to protect my wife from unpleasant notoriety, and also, although you don't deserve it, to keep you from becoming a public laughing stock. So far you have done all the talking; now you are to listen to me. Sit down. You make me nervous strutting about like that. Sit down, I tell you. There, that's better. Now let us see what all this

rigmarole really amounts to. You began by asking for my wife's address, and when I did not immediately gratify what I considered your impertinent curiosity, you launch forth into vague threats of exposure. As far as I can make out from your disjointed harangue, your excuse for prying into my affairs is that by doing so you are protecting a helpless woman from further ill-treatment. Very well. Granting that you really suppose me to be a brute, your behaviour might be perfectly justified if—if you believed that your patient is my wife. But you tell me that you do not. You think that she is either my mistress or my accomplice, or both. Now, if she is a criminal and an immoral woman, you must admit that she has shown extraordinary cleverness, inasmuch as she succeeded not only in eluding the police but in deceiving you. For the impression she made on you was a very favourable one, was it not? She seemed to you unusually innocent as well as absolutely frank, did n't she? "

" Yes," acknowledged the doctor.

" Now, if she was able to dupe so trained an observer as yourself, she must be a remarkable

woman, and cannot be the helpless creature you picture her, and consequently would be in no danger of being forced to submit to abuse from any one."

"True," murmured the doctor.

"But I think I can prove to you that you were not mistaken in your first estimate of her character. This illness of hers—was it real or could it have been feigned?"

"It was real. There is no doubt about that."

"You saw her when she was only semi-conscious, when she was physically incapable of acting a part—did she during that time, either by word or look, betray moral perversity?"

"She did not." The doctor's anger had abated and he was listening to Cyril intently.

"How, then, can you doubt her? And if she is what she seems, she is certainly neither my mistress nor a thief; and if she is not the one nor the other, she must be my wife, and if you go to the police with your absurd suspicions, you will only succeed in making yourself ridiculous."

There was a pause during which the two men eyed each other keenly.

"You make a great point of the fact that my

wife had in her possession a number of valuable ornaments," continued Cyril. "But why should she not? My wife insisted on having all her jewelry with her at Charleroi, and when she escaped from there, they were among the few things she took with her. The excitement of meeting her so unexpectedly and her sudden illness made me forget all about them, otherwise I would have taken them out of the bag, which, as you may have noticed, was not even locked. But the very fact that I did forget all about them and allowed them to pass through the hands of nurses and servants, that alone ought to convince you that I did not come by them dishonestly. You had them for days in your possession; yet you accuse me of having prevented you from examining them. That is really ridiculous! Your whole case against me is built on the wildest conjectures, from which you proceed to draw perfectly untenable inferences. My wife looks young for her age, I grant you; but even you would not venture to swear positively that she is not twenty-eight. You fancied that I neglected her; consequently I am a brute. She is sane now; so you believe that she has

never been otherwise. You imagined that I did not wish you to examine the contents of my wife's bag, therefore the Wilmersley jewels must have been in it."

"What you say sounds plausible enough," acknowledged the doctor, "and it seems impossible to associate you with anything cruel, mean, or even underhand, and yet—and yet—I have an unaccountable feeling that you are not telling me the truth. When I try to analyse my impressions, I find that I distrust not you but your story. You have, however, convinced me that I have no logical basis for my suspicions. That being the case, I shall do nothing for the present. But, if at the end of a fortnight I do not hear that Lady Wilmersley has arrived in England, and has taken her place in the world, then I shall believe that my instinct has not been at fault, and shall do my best to find out what has become of her, even at the risk of creating a scandal or of being laughed at for my pains. But I don't care, I shall feel that I have done my duty. In the meantime I shall write to Dr. Monet. Now I have given you a fair warning, which you can act on as you see fit."

What an unerring scent the man had for falsehood, thought Cyril with unwilling admiration. It was really wonderful the way he disregarded probabilities and turned a deaf ear to reason. He was a big man, Cyril grudgingly admitted.

"I suppose you will not believe me if I tell you that I have no personal animosity toward you, Lord Wilmersley?"

"I know that. And some day we'll laugh over this episode together," replied Cyril, with a heartiness which surprised himself.

"Now that is nice of you," cried the doctor. "My temper is rather hasty, I am sorry to say, and though I don't remember all I said just now, I am sure, I was unnecessarily disagreeable."

"Well, I called you a fool," grinned Cyril.

"So you did, so you did, and may I live to acknowledge that I richly deserve the appellation."

And so their interview terminated with unexpected friendliness.

CHAPTER XIII

CAMPBELL REMONSTRATES

In his note to Guy, Cyril had asked the latter to join him at his club as soon as he had left Priscilla at the hotel, and so when the time passed and his friend neither came nor telephoned, Cyril's anxiety knew no bounds.

What could have happened? thought Cyril. Had Priscilla been arrested? In that case, however, Guy would surely have communicated with him at once, for the police could have had no excuse for detaining the latter.

Several acquaintances he had not seen for years greeted him cordially, but he met their advances so half-heartedly that they soon left him to himself, firmly convinced that the title had turned his head. Only one, an old friend of his father's, refused to be shaken off and sat prosing away quite oblivious of his listener's

preoccupation till the words "your wife" arrested Cyril's wandering attention.

"Yes," the Colonel was saying, "too bad that you should have this added worry just now. Taken ill on the train, too—most awkward."

Cyril was so startled that he could only repeat idiotically: "My wife?"

"Am I wrong?" exclaimed the Colonel, evidently at a loss to understand Cyril's perturbation. "Your wife is in town, is n't she, and ill?"

What should he answer? He dared not risk a denial.

"Who told you that she was ill?" he asked.

"It was in the morning papers. Did n't you see it?"

"In the papers!"

Cyril realised at once that he ought to have foreseen that this was bound to have occurred. Too many people knew the story for it not to have leaked out eventually.

"I have not had time to read them to-day," replied Cyril as soon as he was able to collect his wits a little. "What did they say?"

"Only that your wife had been prostrated by the shock of Wilmersley's murder, and had to

be removed from the train to a nursing home."

"It 's a bore that it got into the papers. My wife is only suffering from a slight indisposition and will be all right in a day or two," Cyril hastened to assure him.

"Glad to hear it. I must meet her. Where is she staying at present?"

"She—she is still at the nursing home—but she is leaving there to-morrow." Then fearing that more questions were impending, Cyril seized the Colonel's hand and shaking it vehemently exclaimed: "I must write some letters. So glad to have had this chat with you," and without giving the Colonel time to answer, he fled from the room.

Cyril looked at his watch. Ten minutes to three! Guy must have met with an accident. Suddenly an alarming possibility occurred to him,—what if the police had traced the jewels to Campbell? The bag, which had disappeared, must have been taken by them. Griggs, when he inquired so innocently about "Lady Wilmersley," had been fully cognisant of the girl's identity. What was to be done now? He could not remain passive and await developments. He

must—was that—could that be Campbell sauntering so leisurely toward him? Indeed it was!

"What has happened?" asked Cyril in a hoarse whisper, dragging his friend into a secluded corner. "Tell me at once."

"Nothing, my dear boy. I am afraid I kept you waiting longer than I intended to. I hope you have not been anxious?" Guy seemed, however, quite unconcerned.

"Anxious!" exclaimed Cyril indignantly. "Well, rather! How could you have kept me in such suspense? Why didn't you come to me at once on leaving Miss Prentice?"

"But I did. I have just left her."

"And she is really all right? The governess, Miss What's her name, is with her?"

"Certainly. But I didn't want to leave Mrs. Thompkins alone with a stranger in a strange place, so I stayed and lunched with them."

Cyril almost choked with rage. *He* had had no lunch at all. He had been too upset to think of such a thing and all the time they—oh! It was too abominable! Campbell was a selfish little brute. He would never forgive him, thought Cyril, scowling down at the complacent

offender. For he was complacent, that was the worst of it. From the top of his sleek, red head to the tips of his immaculate boots, he radiated a triumphant self-satisfaction. What was the matter with the man? wondered Cyril. He seemed indefinably changed. There was a jauntiness about him—a light in his eyes which Cyril did not remember to have noticed before. And what was the meaning of those two violets drooping so sentimentally in his buttonhole? Cyril stared at the flowers as if hypnotised.

"So you liked Miss Prentice?" he managed to say, controlling himself with an effort.

"Rather! But I say, Cyril, it's all rot about her being that Prentice woman."

"Ah, you think so?"

"I don't think—I know. Why, she speaks French like a native."

"How did you find that out?" asked Cyril, forgetting his indignation in his surprise at this new development.

"We had a duffer of a waiter who understood very little English, so Mrs. Thompkins spoke to him in French, and such French! It sounded like the real thing."

Cyril was dumfounded. How could a girl brought up in a small inland village, which she had left only six months before, have learnt French? And then he remembered that the doctor had told him that she had retained a dim recollection of Paris. Why had the significance of that fact not struck him before?

"But if she is not Priscilla Prentice, who on earth can she be? She can't be Anita Wilmersley!" he exclaimed.

"Of course not. She—she—" Guy paused at a loss for a suggestion.

"And yet, if she is not the sempstress, she must be Anita!"

"Why?"

"Because of the jewels in her bag."

"I don't believe they are the Wilmersley jewels——"

"There is no doubt as to that. I have the list somewhere and you can easily verify it."

"Then the bag is not hers. It may have been left in the seat by some one else."

"She opened it in my presence."

"But you proved to me last night that she could not be Lady Wilmersley," insisted Guy.

"So I did. Anita has masses of bright, yellow hair. This girl's hair is dark."

"Well, then——"

"There seems no possible explanation to the enigma," acknowledged Cyril.

"Perhaps she wore a wig."

"She did not. When she fainted I loosened her veil and a strand of her hair caught in my fingers. It was her own, I can swear to that."

"She may have dyed it."

"I never thought of that," exclaimed Cyril. "No, I don't think she could have had time to dye it. It takes hours, I believe. At nine, when she was last seen, she had made no attempt to alter her appearance. Now Wilmersley was——"

"Hold on," cried Guy. "You told me, did you not, that she had cut off her hair because it had turned white?"

"Yes," assented Cyril.

"Very well, then, that disposes of the possibility of its having been dyed."

"So it does. And yet, she carried the Wilmersley jewels, that is a fact we must not forget."

"Then she must be a hitherto unsuspected factor in the case."

"Possibly, and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"I confess I have no other solution to offer. Oh, by the way, what is the number of her room?"

Guy stiffened perceptibly.

"I don't think I remember it."

"How annoying! I particularly asked you to make a note of it!"

"Oh, did you?" Guy's face was averted and he toyed nervously with his eye-glass.

"Of course I did. You must realise—in fact we discussed it together—that I must be able to see her."

"As there is nothing that you can do for her, why should you compromise her still further?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you ought not to take further advantage of her peculiar affliction so as to play the part of a devoted husband."

"This is outrageous—" began Cyril, but Campbell cut him short.

"While you fancied that she was in need of your assistance, I grant that there was some excuse for your conduct, but to continue the

farce any longer would be positively dishonourable."

Cyril was so surprised at Campbell's belligerent tone that for a moment it rendered him speechless. From a boy Guy had always been his humble admirer. What could have wrought this sudden change in him? wondered Cyril. Again his eyes lingered on the violets. It was not possible! And yet Cyril had often suspected that under Guy's obvious shrewdness there lurked a vein of romanticism. And as Cyril surveyed his friend, his wrath slowly cooled. For the first time it occurred to him that Campbell's almost comic exterior must be a real grief to a man of his temperament. His own appearance had always seemed to Cyril such a negligible quantity that he shrank from formulating even in his own mind the reason why he felt that it would be absurd to fear Guy as a rival. A man who is not to be feared is a man to be pitied, and it was this unacknowledged pity, together with a sudden suspicion of the possible tragedy of his friend's life, which allayed Cyril's indignation and made him finally reply gently:

"I think you are mistaken. I am sure she still needs me."

"She does not. Miss Trevor and I are quite able to look after her."

"I don't doubt your goodwill, my dear Guy, but what about her feelings?"

"Feelings! I like that! Do you fancy that her feelings are concerned? Do you imagine that she will be inconsolable at your absence?"

"You appear to forget that she believes me to be her husband. Her pride—her vanity will be hurt if I appear to neglect her." Cyril still spoke very quietly.

"Then I will tell her the truth at once," exclaimed Campbell.

"And risk the recurrence of her illness? Remember the doctor insisted that she must on no account be agitated."

"Why should it agitate her to be told that you are not her husband? I should think it would be a jolly sight more agitating to believe one's self bound to a perfect stranger. It is a wonder it has not driven the poor child crazy."

"Luckily she took the sad news very calmly," Cyril could not refrain from remarking. Really,

Guy was intolerable and he longed with a primitive longing to punch his head. But he had to control himself. Guy was capable of being nasty, if not handled carefully. So he hastily continued:

"How can you undeceive her on one point without explaining the whole situation to her?"

"I—" began Guy, "I—" He paused.

"Exactly. Even you have no solution to offer. Even you have to acknowledge that the relief of knowing that she is not my wife might be offset by learning not only that we are quite in the dark as to who she is, but that at any moment she may be arrested on a charge of murder."

"I don't know what to do!" murmured Guy helplessly.

"Do nothing for the present."

"Nothing!" exclaimed Guy. "Nothing! And leave you to insinuate yourself into her—affections! She must be told the truth some day, but by that time she may have grown to—to—love you." Guy gulped painfully over the word. "You are a married man. That fact evidently seems 'too trifling' to be considered, but I fancy

she will not regard it as casually as you do."

"This is absurd," began Cyril, but Guy intercepted him.

"You feel free to do as you please because you expect to get a divorce, but you have not got it yet, remember, and in the meantime your wife may bring a countersuit, naming Miss—Mrs. Thompkins as corespondent."

This suggestion staggered Cyril for a moment.

"And in that case," continued Campbell, "she would probably think that she ought to marry you. After having been dragged through the filth of a divorce court, she would imagine herself too besmirched to give herself to any other man. And your wealth, your title, and your precious self may not seem to her as desirable as you suppose. She is the sort of girl who would think them a poor exchange for the loss of her reputation and her liberty of choice. When she discovers how you have compromised her by your asinine stupidity, I don't fancy that she will take a lenient view of your conduct."

"You seem to forget that if I had not shielded her with my name, she would undoubtedly have been arrested on the train."

"Oh, I don't doubt you meant well."

"Thanks," murmured Cyril sarcastically.

"All I say is that you must not see her again till this mystery is cleared up. I did n't forget about the number of her apartment, but I was n't going to help you to sneak in to her at all hours. Now, if you want to see her, you will have to go boldly up to the hotel and have yourself properly announced. And I don't think you will care about that."

"I promised to see her. I shall not break my word."

"I don't care a fig for your promises. You shan't see her as long as she believes you to be her husband."

Luckily the room was empty, for both men had risen to their feet.

"I shall see her," repeated Cyril.

"If you do, I warn you that I shall tell her the truth and risk the consequences. She shall not, if I can help it, be placed in a position where she will be forced to marry a man who

has, after all, lived his life. She ought—" Guy paused abruptly

"She ought, in other words, to be given the choice between my battered heart and your virgin affections. Is that it?"

"I mean——"

"Oh, you have made your meaning quite clear, I assure you!" interrupted Cyril. "But what you have been saying is sheer nonsense. You have been calling me to account for things that have not happened, and blaming me for what I have not done. She is not being dragged through the divorce court, and I see no reason to suppose that she ever will be. I am not trying to force her to marry me, and can promise that I shall never do so. Far from taking advantage of the situation, I assure you my conduct has been most circumspect. Don't cross a bridge till you get to it, and don't accuse a man of being a cad just because—" Cyril paused abruptly and looked at Guy, and as he did so, his expression slowly relaxed till he finally smiled indulgently—"just because a certain lady is very charming," he added.

But Guy was not to be pacified. He would

neither retract nor modify his ultimatum. He knew, of course, that Cyril would not dare to write the girl; for if the letter miscarried or was found by the police, it might be fatal to both.

But while they were still heatedly debating the question, a way suddenly occurred to Cyril by which he could communicate with her with absolute safety. So he waited placidly for Guy to take himself off, which he eventually did, visibly elated at having, as he thought, effectually put a stop to further intercourse between the two. He had hardly left the club, however, before Cyril was talking to Priscilla over the telephone! He explained to her as best he could that he had been called out of town for a few days, and begged her on no account to leave her apartments till he returned. He also tried to impress on her that she had better talk about him as little as possible and above all things not to mention either to Campbell or Miss Trevor that she had heard from him and expected to see him before long.

It cost Cyril a tremendous effort to restrict himself to necessary instructions and polite inquiries, especially as she kept begging him to

come back to her as soon as possible. Finally he could bear the strain no longer, and in the middle of a sentence he resolutely hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

WHEN Cyril arrived in Newhaven that evening, he was unpleasantly surprised to find, as he got out of the train, that Judson had been travelling in the adjoining compartment. Had the man been following him, or was it simply chance that had brought them together, he wondered. Oh! If he could only get rid of the fellow!

"You have come to see me, I suppose," he remarked ungraciously.

"Yes, my lord."

"Very well, then, get into the car."

Cyril was in no mood to talk, so the first part of the way was accomplished in silence, but at last, thinking that he might as well hear what the man had to say, he turned to him and asked:

"Have you found out anything of any importance?"

"I fancy so, my lord."

"Really! Well, what is it?"

"If you will excuse me, my lord, I should suggest that we wait till we get to the castle," replied Judson, casting a meaning look at the chauffeur's back.

"Just as you please." His contempt for Judson was so great that Cyril was not very curious to hear his revelations.

"Now," said Cyril, as he flung himself into a low chair before the library fire, "what have you to tell me?"

Before answering Judson peered cautiously around; then, drawing forward a straight-backed chair, he seated himself close to Cyril and folded his hands in his lap.

"In dealing with my clients," he began, "I make it a rule instead of simply stating the results of my work to show them how I arrive at my conclusions. Having submitted to them all the facts I have collected, they are able to judge for themselves as to the value of the evidence on which my deductions are based. And so, my lord, I should like to go over the whole case with you from the very beginning."

Cyril gave a grunt which Judson evidently construed into an assent, for he continued even more glibly:

"The first point I considered was, whether her Ladyship had premeditated her escape. But in order to determine this, we must first decide whom she could have got to help her to accomplish such a purpose. The most careful inquiry has failed to reveal any one who would have been both willing and able to do so, except the sempstress, and as both mistress and maid disappeared almost simultaneously, one's first impulse is to take it for granted that Prentice was her Ladyship's accomplice. This is what every one, Scotland Yard included, believes."

"And you do not?"

"Before either accepting or rejecting this theory, I decided to visit this girl's home. I did not feel clear in my mind about her. All the servants were impressed by her manner and personality, the butler especially so, and he more than hinted that there must be some mystery attached to her. One of the things that stimulated their curiosity was that she kept up a daily correspondence with some one in Plum-

tree. On reaching the village I called at once on the vicar. He is an elderly man, much respected and beloved by his parishioners. I found him in a state of great excitement, having just read in the paper of Prentice's disappearance. I had no difficulty in inducing him to tell me the main facts of her history; the rest I picked up from the village gossips. The girl is a foundling. And till she came to Geralton she was an inmate of the vicar's household. He told me that he would have adopted her, but knowing that he had not sufficient means to provide for her future, he wisely refrained from educating her above her station. Nevertheless, I gathered that the privilege of his frequent companionship had refined her speech and manners, and I am told that she now could pass muster in any drawing-room."

"Did she ever learn French?" interrupted Cyril, eagerly.

"Not that I know of, and I do not believe the vicar would have taught her an accomplishment so useless to one in her position."

"Did she ever go to France?"

"Never. But, why do you ask?"

"No matter—I—but go on with your story."

"Owing partly to the mystery which surrounded her birth and gave rise to all sorts of rumours, and partly to her own personality, the gentry of the neighbourhood made quite a pet of her. As a child she was asked occasionally to play with the Squire's crippled daughter and later she used to go to the Hall three times a week to read aloud to her. So, notwithstanding the vicar's good intentions, she grew up to be neither 'fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring.' Now all went well till about a year ago, when the Squire's eldest son returned home and fell in love with her. His people naturally opposed the match and, as he is entirely dependent upon them, there seemed no possibility of his marrying her. The girl appeared broken-hearted, and when she came to the castle, every one, the vicar included, thought the affair at an end. I am sure, however, that such was not the case, for as no one at the vicarage wrote to her daily, the letters she received must have come from her young man. Furthermore, she told the servants that she had a cousin in Newhaven, but as she has not a relative in the world, this is

obviously a falsehood. Who, then, is this mysterious person she visited? It seems to me almost certain that it was her lover."

"Possibly," agreed Cyril. "But I don't quite see what you are trying to prove by all this. If Prentice did not help her Ladyship to escape, who did?"

"I have not said that Prentice is not a factor in the case, only I believe her part to have been a very subordinate one. Of one thing, however, I am sure, and that is that she did not return to Geralton on the night of the murder."

"How can you be sure of that?" demanded Cyril.

"Because she asked for permission early in the morning to spend the night in Newhaven and had already left the castle before the doctors' visit terminated. Now, although I think it probable that her Ladyship may for a long time have entertained the idea of leaving Geralton, yet I believe that it was the doctors' visit that gave the necessary impetus to convert her idle longing into definite action. Therefore I conclude that Prentice could have had no knowledge of her mistress's sudden flight."

"But how can you know that the whole thing had not been carefully premeditated?"

"Because her Ladyship showed such agitation and distress at hearing the doctors' verdict. If her plans for leaving the castle had been completed, she would have accepted the situation more calmly."

"Has nothing been heard of these doctors?"

"Nothing. We have been able to trace them only as far as London. They could not have been reputable physicians or they would have answered our advertisements, and so I am inclined to believe that you were right and that it was his Lordship who spread the rumours of her Ladyship's insanity."

"I am sure of it," said Cyril.

"Very good. Assuming, therefore, that Lady Wilmersley is sane, we will proceed to draw logical inferences from her actions." Judson paused a moment before continuing: "Now I am convinced that the only connection Prentice had with the affair was to procure some clothes for her mistress, and these had probably been sometime in the latter's possession."

"H'm!" ejaculated Cyril sceptically. "I

think it would have been pretty difficult to have concealed anything from that maid of hers."

"Difficult, I grant you, but not impossible, my lord."

"But if Prentice had no knowledge of the tragedy, why did she not return to the castle? What has become of her? Why have the police been unable to find her?"

"I believe that she joined her lover and that they are together on the continent, for in Plumtree I was told that the young man had recently gone to Paris. As I am sure that she knows nothing of any importance, I thought it useless to waste time and money trying to discover their exact locality. That the police have not succeeded in finding her, I ascribe to the fact that they are looking for a young woman who left Newhaven after and not before the murder."

"You think she left before?"

"Yes, and I have two reasons for this supposition. First, I can discover no place where he or she, either separately or together, could have spent the night. Secondly, if they had left Newhaven the following morning or in fact at any time after the murder, they would certainly have

been apprehended, as all the boats and trains were most carefully watched."

"But no one knew of her disappearance till twenty-four hours later, and during that interval she could easily have got away unobserved."

"No, my lord, there you are mistaken. From the moment that the police were notified that a crime had been committed, every one, especially every woman, who left Newhaven was most attentively scrutinised."

"You are certain that Prentice could not have left Newhaven unnoticed, yet her Ladyship managed to do so! How do you account for that?"

The detective paused a moment and looked fixedly at Cyril.

"Her Ladyship had a very powerful protector, my lord," he finally said.

"A protector! Who?"

Again the detective did not reply immediately.

"It 's no use beating about the bush, my lord, I know everything."

"Well then, out with it," cried Cyril impatiently. "What are you hesitating for? Have you found her Ladyship or have you not?"

"I have, my lord."

"You have! Then why on earth did n't you tell me at once? Where is she?" cried Cyril.

There was a pause during which the detective regarded Cyril through narrowed lids.

"She is at present at the nursing home of Dr. Stuart-Smith," he said at last.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Cyril, sinking back into his chair and negligently lighting another cigarette. "I thought you had discovered something. You mean my wife, Lady Wilmersley——"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, my lord. I don't make mistakes like that. I repeat, the Dowager Lady Wilmersley is under the care of Dr. Smith."

The man's tone was so assured that Cyril was staggered for a moment.

"It is n't true," he asserted angrily.

"Is it possible that you really do not know who the lady is that you rescued that day from the police?" exclaimed the detective, startled out of his habitual impassivity.

"I confess that I do not. But of one thing

I am sure, and that is that she is not the person you suppose."

"Well, my lord, I must say that you have surprised me. Yet I ought to have guessed it. It was stupid of me, very."

"I tell you that you are on the wrong track. Lady Wilmersley has golden hair. Well, this lady's hair is black."

"She has dyed it."

"She has not, for it has turned completely white," exclaimed Cyril, triumphantly.

"Did she tell you so?"

"Yes."

"Her Ladyship is cleverer than I supposed," remarked the detective with a pitying smile.

"I am not such a fool as you seem to think," retorted Cyril. "And I can assure you that the lady in question is incapable of deception."

"All I can say is, my lord, that I am absolutely sure of her Ladyship's identity and that you yourself gave me the clue to her whereabouts."

"I—how?"

"I of course noticed that when you heard her Ladyship had golden hair, you were not only extremely surprised but also very much relieved.

I at once asked myself why such an apparently trivial matter should have so great and so peculiar an effect on you. As you had never seen her Ladyship, I argued that you must that very day have met some one you had reason to suppose to be Lady Wilmersley and that this person had dark hair. By following your movements from the time you landed I found that the only woman with whom you had come in contact was a young lady who had joined you in Newhaven, and that she answered to the description of Lady Wilmersley in every particular, with the sole exception that she had dark hair! I was, however, told that you had said that she was your wife and had produced a passport to prove it. Now I had heard from your valet that her Ladyship was still in France, so you can hardly blame me for doubting the correctness of your statement. But in order to make assurance doubly sure, I sent one of my men to the continent. He reported that her Ladyship had for some months been a patient at Charleroi, but had recently escaped from there, and that you are still employing detectives to find her."

"I did not engage you to pry into my affairs," exclaimed Cyril savagely.

"Nor have I exceeded my duty as I conceive it," retorted the detective. "As your Lordship refused to honour me with your confidence, I had to find out the facts by other means; and you must surely realise that without facts it is impossible for me to construct a theory, and till I can do that my work is practically valueless."

"But my wife has nothing to do with the case."

"Quite so, my lord, but a lady who claimed to be her Ladyship is intimately concerned with it."

"I repeat that is all nonsense."

"If your Lordship will listen to me, I think I can prove to you that as far as the lady's identity is concerned, I have made no mistake. But to do this convincingly, I must reconstruct the tragedy as I conceive that it happened."

"Go ahead; I don't mind hearing your theory."

"First, I must ask you to take it for granted that I am right in believing that Prentice was ignorant of her Ladyship's flight."

"I will admit that much," agreed Cyril.

"Thank you, my lord. Now let us try and imagine exactly what was her Ladyship's posi-

tion on the night of the murder. Her first care must have been to devise some means of eluding his Lordship's vigilance. This was a difficult problem, for Mustapha tells me that his Lordship was not only a very light sleeper but that he suffered from chronic insomnia. You may or may not know that his Lordship had long been addicted to the opium habit and would sometimes for days together lie in a stupor. Large quantities of the drug were found in his room and that explains how her Ladyship managed to get hold of the opium with which she doctored his Lordship's coffee."

"This is, however, mere supposition on your part," objected Cyril.

"Not at all, my lord. I had the sediment of the two cups analysed and the chemist found that one of them contained a small quantity of opium. Her Ladyship, being practically ignorant as to the exact nature of the drug and of the effect it would have on a man who was saturated with it, gave his Lordship too small a dose. Nevertheless, he became immediately stupefied."

"Now, how on earth can you know that?"

"Very easily, my lord. If his Lordship had not been rendered at once unconscious, he would —knowing that an attempt had been made to drug him—have sounded the alarm and deputed Mustapha to guard her Ladyship, which was what he always did when he knew that he was not equal to the task."

"Well, that sounds plausible, at all events," acknowledged Cyril.

"As soon as her Ladyship knew that she was no longer watched," continued the detective, "she at once set to work to disguise herself. As we know, she had provided herself with clothes, but I fancy her hair, her most noticeable feature, must have caused her some anxious moments."

"She may have worn a wig," suggested Cyril, hoping that Judson would accept this explanation of the difficulty, in which case he would be able triumphantly to demolish the latter's theory of the girl's identity, by stating that he could positively swear that her hair was her own.

"No, my lord. After carefully investigating the matter I have come to the conclusion that she did not. And my reasons are, first, that no

hairdresser in Newhaven has lately sold a dark wig to any one, and, secondly, that no parcel arrived, addressed either to her Ladyship or to Prentice, which could have contained such an article. On the other hand, as his Lordship had for years dyed his hair and beard, her Ladyship had only to go into his dressing-room to procure a very simple means of transforming herself."

"But does n't it take ages to dye hair?" asked Cyril.

"If it is done properly, yes; but the sort of stain his Lordship used can be very quickly applied. I do not believe it took her Ladyship more than half an hour to dye enough of her hair to escape notice, but in all probability she had no time to do it very thoroughly and that which escaped may have turned white. I don't know anything about that."

This was a possibility which had not occurred to Cyril; but still he refused to be convinced.

"Very well, my lord. Let me continue my story: Before her Ladyship had completed her preparations, his Lordship awoke from his stupor."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because, if his Lordship had not tried to prevent her escape, she would have had no reason for killing him. Probably they had a struggle, her hand fell on the pistol, and the deed was done——"

"But what about the ruined picture?"

"Her Ladyship, knowing that there was no other portrait of her in existence, destroyed it in order to make it difficult for the police to follow her."

"H'm," grunted Cyril. "You make her Ladyship out a nice, cold-blooded, calculating sort of person. If you think she at all resembles the young lady at the nursing home, I can only tell you that you are vastly mistaken."

"As I have not the honour of knowing the lady in question, I cannot form any opinion as to that. But let us continue: I wish to confess at once that I am not at all sure how her Ladyship reached Newhaven. That waiting automobile complicates matters. On the face of it, it seems as if it must have some connection with the case. I have also a feeling that it has, and yet for the life of me I cannot discover the connecting link. Whatever the younger man was,

the elder was undoubtedly a Frenchman, and I have ascertained that with the exception of an old French governess, who lived with her Ladyship before her marriage, and of Mustapha and Valdriguez, Lady Wilmersley knew no foreigner whatever. Besides, these two men seem to have been motoring about the country almost at random, and it may have been the merest accident which brought them to the foot of the long lane just at the time when her Ladyship was in all probability leaving the castle. Whether they gave her a lift as far as Newhaven, I do not know. How her Ladyship reached the town constitutes the only serious—I will not call it break—but hiatus—in my theory. From half-past six the next morning, however, her movements can be easily followed. A young lady, dressed as you know, approached the station with obvious nervousness. Three things attracted the attention of the officials: first, the discrepancy between the simplicity, I might almost say the poverty, of her clothes, and the fact that she purchased a first-class ticket; secondly, that she did not wish her features to be seen; and thirdly, that she had no luggage except a small hand-bag. How her

Ladyship managed to elude the police, and what has subsequently occurred to her, I do not need to tell your Lordship."

"You have n't in the least convinced me that the young lady is her Ladyship, not in the least. You yourself admit that there is a hiatus in your story; well, that hiatus is to me a gulf which you have failed to bridge. Because one lady disappears from Geralton and another appears the next morning in Newhaven, you insist the two are identical. But you have not offered me one iota of proof that such is the case."

"What more proof do you want? She is the only person who left Newhaven by train or boat who even vaguely resembled her Ladyship."

"That means nothing. Her Ladyship may not have come to Newhaven at all, but have been driven to some hiding-place in the Frenchman's car."

"I think that quite impossible, for every house, every cottage, every stable and barn even, for twenty-five miles around, has been carefully searched. Besides, this would mean that the murder had been premeditated and the coming of the motor had been pre-arranged; and lastly, as

the gardener's wife testifies that the car left Geralton certainly no earlier than eleven-thirty, and as the two men reached the hotel before twelve, this precludes the possibility that they could have done more than drive straight back to the Inn, as the motor is by no means a fast one."

"But, my man, they may have secreted her Ladyship in the town itself and have taken her with them to France the next morning."

"Impossible. In the first place, they left alone, the porter saw them off; and secondly, no one except the two Frenchmen purchased a ticket for the continent either in the Newhaven office or on the boat."

Cyril rose from his seat. Judson's logic was horribly convincing; no smallest detail had apparently escaped him. As the man piled argument on argument, he had found himself slowly and grudgingly accepting his conclusions.

"As you are in my employ, I take it for granted that you will not inform the police or the press of your—suspicions," he said at last.

"Certainly not, my lord. On the other hand,

I must ask you to allow me to withdraw from the case."

"But why?" exclaimed Cyril.

"Because my duty to you, as my client, prevents me from taking any further steps in this matter."

"I don't understand you!"

"I gather that you are less anxious to clear up the mystery than to protect her Ladyship. Am I not right?"

"Yes," acknowledged Cyril.

"You would even wish me to assist you in providing a safe retreat for her."

"Exactly."

"Well, my lord, that is just what I cannot do. It is my duty, as I conceive it, to hold my tongue, but I should not feel justified in aiding her Ladyship to escape the consequences of her—her—action. In order to be faithful to my engagement to you, I am willing to let the public believe that I have made a failure of the case. I shall not even allow my imagination to dwell on your future movements, but more than that I cannot do."

"You take the position that her Ladyship is

an ordinary criminal, but you must realise that that is absurd. Even granting that she is responsible for her husband's death—of which, by the way, we have no absolute proof—are you not able to make allowances for a poor woman goaded to desperation by an opium fiend?"

"I do not constitute myself her Ladyship's judge, but I don't think your Lordship quite realises all that you are asking of me. Even if I were willing to waive the question of my professional honour, I should still decline to undertake a task which, I know, is foredoomed to failure. For, if *I* discovered Lady Wilmersley with so little difficulty, Scotland Yard is bound to do so before long. The trail is too unmistakable. It is impossible—absolutely impossible, I assure you, that the secret can be kept."

Cyril moved uneasily.

"I wish I could convince your Lordship of this and induce you to allow the law to take its course. Her Ladyship ought to come forward at once and plead justifiable homicide. If she waits till she is arrested, it will tell heavily against her."

"But she is ill, really ill," insisted Cyril.

"Dr. Stuart-Smith tells me that if she is not kept perfectly quiet for the next few weeks, her nervous system may never recover from the shock."

"H'm! That certainly complicates the situation; on the other hand, you must remember that discovery is not only inevitable but imminent, and that the police will not stop to consider her Ladyship's nervous system. No, my lord, the only thing for you to do is to break the news to her yourself and to persuade her to give herself up. If you don't, you will both live to regret it."

"That may be so," replied Cyril after a minute's hesitation, "but in this matter I must judge for myself. I still hope that you are wrong and that either the young woman in question is not Lady Wilmersley or that it was not her Ladyship who killed my cousin, and I refuse to jeopardise her life till I am sure that there is no possibility of your having made a mistake. But don't throw up the case yet. So far you have only sought for evidence which would strengthen your theory of her Ladyship's guilt, now I want you to look at the case from a fresh

point of view. I want you to start all over again and to work on the assumption that her Ladyship did not fire the shot. I cannot accept your conclusion as final till we have exhausted every other possibility. These Frenchmen, for instance, have they or have they not a connection with the case? And then there is Valdriguez. Why have you never suspected her? At the inquest she acknowledged that no one had seen her leave her Ladyship's apartments and we have only her word for it that she spent the evening in her room."

"True. But, if I went on the principle of suspecting every one who cannot prove themselves innocent, I should soon be lost in a quagmire of barren conjectures. Of course, I have considered Valdriguez, but I can find no reason for suspecting her."

"Well, I could give you a dozen reasons."

"Indeed, my lord, and what are they?"

"In the first place, we know that she is a hard, unprincipled woman, or she would never have consented to aid my cousin in depriving his unfortunate wife of her liberty. A woman who would do that, is capable of any villainy.

Then, on the witness-stand did n't you feel that she was holding something back? Oh, I forgot you were not present at the inquest."

"I was there, my lord, but I took good care that no one should recognise me."

"Well, and what impression did she make on you?"

"A fairly favourable one, my lord. I think she spoke the truth and I fancy that she is almost a religious fanatic."

"You don't mean to say, Judson, that you allowed yourself to be taken in by her sanctimonious airs and the theatrical way that she kept clutching at that cross on her breast? A religious fanatic indeed! Why, don't you see that no woman with a spark of religion in her could have allowed her mistress to be treated as Lady Wilmersley was?"

"Quite so, my lord, and it is because Valdriguez impressed me as an honest old creature that I am still doubtful whether her Ladyship is insane or not, and this uncertainty hampers me very much in my work."

"Lady Upton assured me that her granddaughter's mind had never been unbalanced and

that his Lordship, although he frequently wrote to her, had never so much as hinted at such a thing; and if you believe the young lady at the nursing home to be Lady Wilmersley, I give you my word that she shows no sign of mental derangement."

"Well, that seems pretty final, and yet—and yet—I cannot believe that Valdriguez is a vicious woman. A man in my profession acquires a curious instinct in such matters, my lord." The detective paused a moment and when he began again, he spoke almost as if he were reasoning with himself. Now, if my estimate of Valdriguez is correct, and if it is also a fact that Lady Wilmersley has never been insane, there are certainly possibilities connected with this affair which I have by no means exhausted—and so, my lord, I am not only willing but anxious to continue on the case, if you will agree to allow me to ignore her Ladyship's existence."

"Certainly. But tell me, Judson, how can you hope to reconcile two such absolutely contradictory facts?"

"Two such apparently contradictory facts," gently corrected the detective. "Well, my

lord, I propose to find out more of this woman's antecedents. I have several times tried to get her to talk, but so far without the least success. She says that she will answer any question put to her on the witness-stand, but that it is against her principles to gossip about her late master and mistress. She is equally reticent as to her past life and when I told her that her silence seemed to me very suspicious, she demanded—suspicious of what? She went on to say that she could not see that it was anybody's business, where she lived or what she had done, and that she had certainly no intention of gratifying my idle curiosity; and that was the last word I could get out of her. Although she treated me so cavalierly, I confess to a good deal of sympathy with her attitude."

"Have you questioned Mrs. Eversley about her?" asked Cyril. "She was housekeeper here when Valdriguez first came to Geralton and ought to be able to tell you what sort of person she was in her youth."

"Mrs. Eversley speaks well of her. The only thing she told me which may have a bearing on the case is, that in the old days his

Lordship appeared to admire Valdriguez very much."

"Ah! I thought so," cried Cyril.

"But we cannot be too sure of this, my lord. For when I tried to find out what grounds she had for her statement, she had so little proof to offer that I cannot accept her impression as conclusive evidence. As far as I can make out, the gossip about them was started by his Lordship going to the Catholic church in Newhaven."

"By going to the Catholic church!" exclaimed Cyril.

"Exactly. Not a very compromising act on his Lordship's part, one would think. But as his Lordship was not a Catholic, his doing so naturally aroused a good deal of comment. At first the neighbourhood feared that he had been converted by his mother, who had often lamented that she had not been allowed to bring up her son in her own faith. It was soon noticed, however, that whenever his Lordship attended a popish service, his mother's pretty maid was invariably present, and so people began to put two and two together and before long it was universally assumed that she was the magnet which

had drawn him away from his own church. I asked Mrs. Eversley if they had been seen together elsewhere, and she reluctantly admitted that they had. On several occasions they were seen walking in the Park but always, so Mrs. Eversley assured me, in full view of the castle. She had felt it her duty to speak to Valdriguez on the subject, and the latter told her that his Lordship was interested in her religion and that she was willing to run the risk of having her conduct misconstrued if she could save his soul from eternal damnation. She also gave Mrs. Eversley to understand that she had her mistress's sanction, and as her Ladyship treated Valdriguez more as a companion and friend than as a maid, Mrs. Eversley thought this quite likely and did not venture to remonstrate further. So the intimacy, if such it could be called, continued as before. What the outcome of this state of things would have been we do not know, for shortly afterwards both Lord and Lady Wilmersley died and Valdriguez left Geralton. When his Lordship went away a few weeks later, a good many people suspected that he had joined her on the continent. Mrs. Eversley,

however, does not believe this. She has the most absolute confidence in Valdriguez's virtue, and I think her testimony is pretty reliable."

"Bah! Mrs. Eversley is an honest, simple old soul. A clever adventuress would have little difficulty in hoodwinking her. Mark my words, you have found the key to the mystery. What more likely than that his Lordship—whose morals, even as a boy, were none of the best—seduced Valdriguez and that she returned to Geralton so as to have the opportunity of avenging her wrongs."

"I can think of nothing more unlikely than that his Lordship should have selected his cast-off mistress as his wife's attendant," Judson drily remarked.

"Not at all. You did n't know him," replied Cyril. "I can quite fancy that the situation would have appealed to his cynical humour."

"Your opinion of the late Lord Wilmersley is certainly not flattering, but even if we take for granted that such an arrangement would not have been impossible to his Lordship, I still refuse to believe that Valdriguez would have agreed to it; even assuming that his Lordship

had wronged her and that she had nursed a murderous resentment against him all these years, I cannot see how she could have hoped to further her object by accepting the humiliating position of his wife's maid. It also seems to me incredible that a woman whose passions were so violent as to find expression in murder could have controlled them during a lifetime. But leaving aside these considerations, I have another reason to urge against your theory: Would his Lordship have trusted a woman who, he knew, had a grievance against him, as he certainly trusted Valdriguez? She had free access to his apartments. What was there to have prevented her from giving him an overdose of some drug during one of the many times when he was half-stupefied with opium? Nothing. The risk of detection would have been infinitesimal. No, my lord, why Valdriguez returned to Geralton is an enigma, I grant you, but your explanation does not satisfy me."

"As long as you acknowledge that Valdriguez's presence here needs an explanation and are willing to work to find that explanation, I

don't care whether you accept my theory or not; all I want to get at is the truth."

"The truth, my lord," said the detective, as he rose to take his leave, "is often more praised than appreciated."

CHAPTER XV

FINGER PRINTS IN THE DUST

As Cyril sat toying with his dinner, it was little by little borne in on him that the butler had something on his mind. How he got this impression he really did not know, for Douglas performed his duties as precisely, as unobtrusively as ever. Yet long before the last course had been reached, Cyril was morally certain that he had not been mistaken. He waited for the dessert to be placed on the table; then, having motioned the footmen to leave the room, he half turned to the butler, who was standing behind his chair.

"Douglas."

"Yes, my lord?" The man stepped forward, so as to face his master.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Cyril, scrutinising the other attentively.

The abrupt question seemed neither to sur-

prise nor to discompose the butler; yet he hesitated before finally answering:

"I—I don't quite know, my lord."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Cyril impatiently. "You must know whether or not something has happened to upset you."

Douglas fidgeted uneasily.

"Well, my lord—it 's this way, my lord—Susan, the upper 'ousemaid, says as how there has been somebody or—" here his voice sank to a whisper and he cast an apprehensive glance over his shoulder—"or something in the library last night!"

Cyril put down the glass of wine he was carrying to his lips untasted.

"She thinks she saw a ghost in the library?"

"No, my lord. She did n't see anything, but this morning she found finger-marks on the top of his Lordship's desk."

"Pooh! What of that? One of the servants may have gone in there out of curiosity."

"But what would anybody be doing there in the night, I should like to know? And Susan says those marks could only 'ave been made last night, my lord."

"Why?"

"On account of the dust, my lord. It takes time for dust to settle and a 'ousemaid, who knows 'er business, can tell, after she 's been in a place a couple of months, just about 'ow long it 's been since any particular piece of furniture has been dusted. Aye, Susan knows, my lord. No young 'ousemaid can pull the wool over 'er eyes, I can tell you."

"Does every one know of Susan's suspicions?"

"No, my lord. Susan 's a sensible woman, and though she was frightened something terrible, she only told Mrs. Eversley and Mrs. Eversley told me and we three agreed we 'd hold our tongues. Every one 's that upset as it is, that they 'd all 'ave 'ighstrikes if they knew that It was walking."

"Don't be a fool, Douglas. No one believes in ghosts nowadays. But even if there were such things, an intangible spirit could n't possibly leave finger-marks behind it."

"But, my lord, if you 'll excuse me, my aunt's cousin—" began the butler, but Cyril cut him short.

"I have no time now to hear about your

aunt's cousin, though no doubt it is a most interesting story. Send Susan to me at once."

"Very good, my lord."

Susan had, however, no further information to impart. She was positive that the marks must have been made some time during the night.

"And it 's my belief they were made by a skeleton hand," she added. "And as for going into that room again, indeed I just could n't, not for nobody, meaning no disrespect to your Lordship; and as for the other 'ousemaids, they 'll not go near the place either and have n't been since the murder."

"Very well, Susan, I shall not ask you to do so. Those rooms shall not be opened again till this mystery is cleared up. I will go now and lock them up myself."

"Thank you, my lord."

Striding rapidly across the hall, Cyril opened the door of the library. This part of the castle had been equipped with electric light and steam heat, and as he stepped into the darkness, the heavy-scented air almost made him reel. Having found the switch, he noticed at once that the room had indefinably changed since he had been

in it last. Notwithstanding the heat, notwithstanding the flood of crimson light, which permeated even the farthest corners, it had already assumed the chill, gloomy aspect of an abandoned apartment.

Stooping over the desk, he eagerly inspected the marks which had so startled the housemaid. Yes, they were still quite visible, although a delicate film of dust had already begun to soften the precision of their outline—very strange! They certainly did look like the imprint of skeleton fingers. He laid his own hand on the desk. His fingers left a mark at least twice as wide as those of the mysterious visitant.

For a long time he stood with bent head pondering deeply; then, throwing back his shoulders, as if he had arrived at some decision, he proceeded to explore the entire suite. Having satisfied himself that no one was secreted on the premises, he turned off the light, shut the door —but he did not turn the key.

Some hours later Cyril, in his great four-posted bed, lay watching, with wide-open eyes, the fantastic shadows thrown by the dancing firelight on the panelled walls. To woo sleep

was evidently not his intention, for from time to time he lighted a wax vesta and consulted the watch he held in his hand. At last the hour seemed to satisfy him, for he got out of bed and made a hasty toilet. Having accomplished this as best he could in the semi-obscurity, he slipped a pistol into his pocket and left his room.

Groping his way through the darkness, he descended the stairs and cautiously traversed the hall. Not a sound did he make. His stockinged feet moved noiselessly over the heavy carpet. At the door of the library he paused a moment and listened intently; then, pistol in hand, he threw open the door. Darkness and silence alone confronted him. Closing the door behind him, he lighted a match and carefully inspected the desk. Having assured himself that no fresh marks had appeared on its polished surface, he blew out the match and ensconced himself as comfortably as the limited space permitted behind the curtains of one of the windows. There he waited patiently for what seemed to him an eternity. He had just begun to fear that his vigil would prove fruitless, when his ear was gladdened by a slight sound. A moment later

the light was switched on. Hardly daring to breathe, Cyril peered through the curtains. Valdriguez! Cyril's heart gave a bound of exultation. Had he not guessed that those marks could only have been made by her small, bony fingers?

Clad like a nun in a loose, black garment, which fell in straight, austere folds to her feet; a black shawl, thrown over her head, casting strange shadows on her pale, haggard face, she advanced slowly, almost majestically, into the room. Cyril had to acknowledge that she looked more like a medieval saint than a midnight marauder.

Evidently the woman had no fear of detection, for she never even cast one suspicious glance around her; nor did she appear to feel that there was any necessity for haste, for she lingered for some time near the writing-table, gazing at it, as if it had a fascination for her; but, finally, she turned away with a hopeless sigh and directed her attention to the bookcase. This she proceeded to examine in the most methodical manner. Book after book was taken down, shaken, and the binding carefully

scrutinised. Having cleared a shelf, she drew a tape measure from her pocket and rapped and measured the back and sides of the case itself.

What on earth could she be looking for, wondered Cyril. Not a will, surely? For his cousin's will, executed at the date of his marriage, had been found safely deposited with his solicitor. A later will, perhaps? One in which she hoped that her master had remembered her, as he had probably promised her that he would? Yes, that must be it.

Well, there was no further need of concealment, he decided, so, parting the curtains, he stepped into the room.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

His own voice startled him, it rang out so loud and harsh in the silence of the night.

Valdriguez knelt on the floor with her back to him, and it seemed as if the sudden shock had paralysed her, for she made no effort to move, and her hand, arrested in the act of replacing a book, remained outstretched, as if it had been turned to stone.

"It is I, your master. What are you doing here?" he repeated.

He saw her shudder convulsively, then slowly she raised her head, and as her great, tragic eyes met his, Cyril was conscious of a revulsion of feeling toward her. Never had he seen anything so hopeless yet so undaunted as the look she gave him. It reminded him, curiously enough, of a look he had once seen in the eyes of a lioness, who, with a bullet through her heart, still fought to protect her young.

Staggering a little as she rose, Valdriguez nevertheless managed to draw herself up to her full height.

"I am here, my lord, to get what is mine—mine," she repeated almost fiercely.

Cyril pulled himself together. It was absurd, he reasoned, to allow himself to be impressed by her strange personality.

"A likely story!" he exclaimed; and the very fact that he was more than half-inclined to believe her, made him speak more roughly than he would otherwise have done.

"Think what you like," she cried, shrugging her shoulders contemptuously. "Have me arrested—have me hung—what do I care? Death has no terrors for me."

"So you confess that it was you who murdered his Lordship? Ah, I suspected it! Your sanctimonious airs did n't deceive me," exclaimed Cyril triumphantly.

"No, I did not murder him," she replied calmly, almost indifferently.

"I think you will have some difficulty convincing the police of that. You have no alibi to prove that you were not in these rooms at the time of the murder, and now when I tell them that I found you trying to steal——"

"I am no thief," she interrupted him with blazing eyes. "I tell you, I came here to get what is mine by right."

"Do you really expect me to believe that? Even if what you say were true, you would not have had to sneak in here in the middle of the night. You know very well that I should have made no objections to your claiming your own."

"So you say. But if I had gone to you and told you that a great lord had robbed me, a poor woman, of something which is dearer to me than life itself, would you have believed me? If I had said to you, 'I must look through his Lordship's papers; I must be free to search every-

where,' would you have given me permission to do so? No, never. You think I fear you? That it was because I was ashamed of my errand that I came here at this hour? Bah! All I feared was that I should be prevented from discovering the truth. The truth?" Valdriguez's voice suddenly dropped and she seemed to forget Cyril's presence. "It is here, somewhere." She continued speaking as if to herself and her wild eyes swept feverishly around the room. "He told me it was here—and yet how can I be sure of it? He may have lied to me about this as he did about everything else. How can I tell? Oh, this uncertainty is torture! I cannot bear it any longer, oh, my God!" she cried, clasping her hands and lifting her streaming eyes to heaven, "Thou knowest that I have striven all my life to do Thy will; I have borne the cross that Thou sawest fit to lay upon me without a murmur, nor have I once begged for mercy at Thy hands; but now, now, oh, my Father, I beseech thee, give me to know the truth before I die——"

Cyril watched the woman narrowly. He felt that he must try and maintain a judicial atti-

tude toward her and not allow himself to be led astray by his sympathies which, as he knew to his cost, were only too easily aroused. After all, he reasoned, was it not more than likely that she was delivering this melodramatic tirade for his benefit? On the other hand, it was against his principles as well as against his inclinations to deal harshly with a woman.

"Calm yourself, Valdriguez," he said at last. "If you can convince me that his Lordship had in his possession something which rightfully belonged to you, I promise that, if it can be found, it shall be restored to you. Tell me, what it is that you are looking for?"

"Tell you—never! Are you not of his blood? You promise—so did he—the smooth-tongued villain! All these years have I lived on promises! Never will I trust one of his race again."

"You have got to trust me whether you want to or not. Your position could not be worse than it is, could it? Don't you see that your only hope lies in being able to pursuade me that you are an honest woman?"

For the first time Valdriguez looked at Cyril

attentively. He felt as if her great eyes were probing his very soul.

"Indeed, you do not look cruel or deceitful. And, as you say, I am powerless without you, so I must take the risk of your being what you seem. I will tell you the truth. But first, my lord, will you swear not to betray my secret to any living being?"

"You have my word for it. That is—" he hastily added, "if it has nothing to do with the murder."

"Nothing, my lord."

CHAPTER XVI

THE STORY OF A WRONG

CYRIL waited for her to continue, but for a long time it seemed doubtful if she would have the courage to do so.

"I am looking," she said at last, speaking slowly and with a visible effort, "for a paper which will tell me whether my—son is alive or dead."

"Your son? So you were his Lordship's mistress——"

"Before God I was his wife! I am no wanton, my lord!"

"The old story—" began Cyril, but Valdriguez stopped him with a furious gesture.

"Do not dare to say that my child's mother was a loose woman! I will not permit it. Arthur Wilmersley—may his Maker judge him as he deserves—wrecked my life, but at least

he never doubted my virtue. He knew that the only way to get me was to marry me."

"So he actually married you?" exclaimed Cyril.

"No—but for a long time I believed that he had. How could a young, innocent girl have suspected that the man she loved was capable of such cold-blooded deception? Even now, I cannot blame myself for having fallen into the trap he baited with such fiendish cunning. Think of it—he induced me to consent to a secret marriage by promising that if I made this sacrifice for his sake, he would become a convert to my religion—my religion! And as we stood together before the altar, I remember that I thanked God for giving me this opportunity of saving a soul from destruction. I never dreamed that the church he took me to was nothing but an old ruin he had fitted up as a chapel for the occasion. How could I guess that the man who married us was not a priest but a mountebank, whom he had hired to act the part?"

Valdriguez bowed her head and the tears trickled through her thin fingers.

"I know that not many people would believe

you but, well—I do." It seemed to Cyril as if the words sprang to his lips unbidden.

"Then indeed you are a good man," exclaimed Valdriguez, "for it is given only to honest people to have a sure ear for the truth. Now it will be easier to tell you the rest. Some weeks after we had gone through this ceremony, first Lord and then Lady Wilmersley died; on her death-bed I confided to my lady that I was her son's wife and she gave me her blessing. My humble birth she forgave—after all it was less humble than her own—and was content that her son had chosen a girl of her own race and faith. As soon as the funeral was over, I urged my husband to announce our marriage, but he would not. He proposed that we should go for a while to the continent so that on our return it would be taken for granted that we had been married there, and in this way much unpleasant talk avoided. So we went to Paris and there we lived together openly as man and wife, not indeed under his name but under mine. He pretended that he wanted for once to see the world from the standpoint of the people; that he desired for a short time to be free from the

restrictions of his rank. I myself dreaded so much entering a class so far above me that I was glad of the chance of spending a few more months in obscurity. For some weeks I was happy, then Lord Wilmersley began to show himself to me as he really was. We had taken a large apartment near the Luxembourg, and soon it became the meeting-ground for the most reckless element of the Latin Quarter. Ah, if you but knew what sights I saw, what things I heard in those days! I feared that my very soul was being polluted, so I consulted a priest as to what I should do. He told me it was my duty to remain constantly at my husband's side; with prayer and patience I might some day succeed in reforming him. So I stayed in that hell and bore the insults and humiliations he heaped upon me without a murmur. Now, looking back on the past, I think my meekness and resignation only exasperated him, for he grew more and more cruel and seemed to think of nothing but how to torture me into revolt. Whether I should have been given the strength to endure indefinitely, the life he led me I do not know, but one evening, when we were as usual entertaining a

disreputable rabble, a young man entered. I recognised him at once. It was the man who had married us! He was dressed in a brown velveteen suit; a red sash encircled his waist; and on his arm he flaunted a painted woman. Imagine my feelings! I stood up and turned to my husband. I could not speak—and he, the man I had loved, only laughed—laughed! Never shall I forget the sound of that laughter. . . .

"That night my child was born. That was twenty-eight years ago, but it seems as if it were but yesterday that I held his small, warm body in my arms. . . Then comes a period of which I remember nothing, and when I finally recovered my senses, they told me my child was dead. . . . As soon as I was able to travel, I returned to my old home in Seville and there I lived, working and praying—praying for my own soul and for that of my poor baby, who had died without receiving the sacrament of baptism. . . . Years passed. I had become resigned to my lot, when one day I received a letter from Lord Wilmersley. Oh! If I had only destroyed it unopened, how much anguish would have been spared me! But at first when

I read it, I thought my happiness would have killed me, for Lord Wilmersley wrote that my boy was not dead and that if I would meet him in Paris, he would give me further news of him. I hesitated not a moment. At once did I set out on my journey. On arriving in Paris I went to the hotel he had indicated and was shown into a private *salon*. There for the first time in a quarter of a century I saw again the man I had once regarded as my husband. At first I had difficulty in recognising him, for now his true character was written in every line of his face and figure. But I hardly gave a thought either to him or to my wrongs, so great was my impatience to hear news of my son. . . . Then that fiend began to play with me as a cat with a mouse. Yes, my boy lived, had made his way in the world—that was all he would tell me. My child had been adopted by some well-to-do people, who had brought him up as their own—no, I need n't expect to hear another word. Yes, he was a fine, strong lad—he would say no more. . . . Can you imagine the scene? Finally, having wrought me up to the point where I would have done anything to wring the truth

from him, he said to me: 'I have recently married a young wife and I am not such a fool as to trust my honour in the keeping of a girl who married an old man like me for his money. Now I have a plan to propose to you. Come and live with her as her maid and help me to guard her from all eyes, and if you fulfil your duties faithfully, at the end of three years I promise that you shall see your son.'

"His revolting proposition made my blood boil. Never, never, I told him, would I accept such a humiliating situation. He merely shrugged his shoulders and said that in that case I need never hope to hear what had become of my son. I raved, threatened, pleaded, but he remained inflexible, and finally I agreed to do his bidding."

"So you, who call yourself a Christian, actually consented to help that wretch to persecute his unfortunate young wife?" demanded Cyril sternly.

Valdriguez flung her head back defiantly.

"His wife? What was she to me? Besides, had she not taken him for better or worse? Why should I have helped her to break the

bonds her own vows had imposed on her? He did not ill-treat her, far from it. He deprived her of her liberty, but what of that? A nun has even less freedom than she had. What were her sufferings compared to mine? Think of it, day after day I had to stand aside and watch the man I had once looked upon as my husband, lavish his love, his thought, his very life indeed, on that pretty doll. Although I no longer loved him, my flesh quivered at the sight."

"Nevertheless—" began Cyril.

"My lord, I care not for your judgment nor for that of any man. I came here to find my son. Would you have had me give up that sacred task because a pink and white baby wanted to flaunt her beauty before the world? Ah, no! Lady Wilmersley's fate troubles me not at all; but what breaks my heart is that, as Arthur died just before the three years were up, I fear that now I shall never know what has become of my boy. Sometimes I have feared that he is dead—but no, I will not believe it! My boy lives! I feel it!" she cried, striking her breast. "And in this room—perhaps within reach of my hand as I stand here—is the paper which

would tell me where he is. Ah, my lord, I beg, I entreat you to help me to find it!"

"I will gladly do so, but what reason have you for supposing that there is such a paper?"

"It is true that I have only Lord Wilmersley's word for it," she replied, and her voice sounded suddenly hopeless. "Yet not once but many times he said to me: 'I have a paper in which is written all you wish to know, but as I do not trust you, I have hidden it, yes, in this very room have I hidden it.' And now he is dead and I cannot find it! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Even if we cannot find the paper, there are other means of tracing your son. We will advertise——"

"Never!" she interrupted him vehemently. "I will never consent to do anything which might reveal to him the secret of his birth. I would long ago have taken steps to find him, if I had not realised that I could not do so without taking a number of people into my confidence, and, if I did that, the story of my shame would be bound to leak out. Not for myself did I care, but for him. Think of it, if what Lord

Wilmersley told me was true, he holds an honourable position, believes himself the son of respectable parents. Would it not be horrible, if he should suddenly learn that he is the nameless child of a servant girl and a villain? The fear that he should somehow discover the truth is always before me. That is why I made you swear to keep my secret."

"Of course, I will do as you wish, but I assure you that you exaggerate the risk. Still, let us first search this room thoroughly; then, if we do not find the paper, it will be time enough to decide what we shall do next."

"Ah, my lord, you are very good to me and may God reward you as you deserve. Day and night will I pray for you." And to Cyril's dismay, Valdriguez suddenly bent down and covered his hands with kisses.

CHAPTER XVII

GUY RELENTS

CYRIL and Valdriguez spent the next morning making a thorough search of the library, but the paper they were looking for could not be found. Cyril had from the first been sceptical of success. He could not believe that her child was still alive and was convinced that Arthur Wilmersley had fabricated the story simply to retain his hold over the unfortunate mother. Valdriguez, however, for a long time refused to abandon the quest. Again and again she ransacked places they had already carefully examined. When it was finally borne in upon her that there was no further possibility of finding what she so sought, the light suddenly went out of her face and she would have fallen if Cyril had not caught her and placed her in a chair. With arms hanging limply to her sides,

her half-closed eyes fixed vacantly in front of her, she looked as if death had laid his hand upon her. Thoroughly alarmed, Cyril had the woman carried to her room and sent for a doctor. When the latter arrived, he shook his head hopelessly. She had had a stroke; there was very little he could do for her. In his opinion it was extremely doubtful if she would ever fully recover her faculties, he said.

Cyril having made every possible arrangement for the comfort of the afflicted woman, at last allowed his thoughts to revert to his own troubles.

He realised that with the elimination of both Valdriguez and Prentice there was no one but Anita left who could reasonably be suspected of the murder; for that the two Frenchmen were implicated in the affair, was too remote a possibility to be seriously considered. No, he must make up his mind to face the facts: the girl was Anita Wilmersley and she had killed her husband! What was he going to do, now that he knew the truth? Judson's advice that Anita should give herself up, he rejected without a moment's hesitation. Yet, he had to acknow-

ledge that there was little hope of her being able to escape detection, as long as the police knew her to be alive. . . . Suddenly an idea occurred to him. If they could only be made to believe that she was dead, that and that alone would free her at once and forever from their surveillance. She would be able to leave England; to resume her life in some distant country where he . . . Cyril shrank instinctively from pursuing the delicious dream further. He tried to force himself to consider judicially the scheme that was shaping itself in his mind; to weigh calmly and dispassionately the chances for and against its success. If a corpse resembling Anita were found, dressed in the clothes she wore the day she left Geralton, it would surely be taken for granted that the body was hers and that she had been murdered. But how on earth was he to procure such a corpse and, having procured it, where was he to hide it? The neighbourhood of the castle had been so thoroughly searched that it would be no easy task to persuade the police that they had overlooked any spot where a body might be secreted. Certainly the plan presented almost insurmount-

able difficulties, but as it was the only one he could think of, Cyril clung to it with bull-dog tenacity.

"Impossible? Nonsense! Nothing is impossible! Impossible is but a word designed to shield the incompetent or frighten the timid," he muttered loudly in his heart, unconsciously squaring his broad shoulders.

He decided to leave Geralton at once, for the plan must be carried out immediately or not at all, and it was only in London that he could hope to procure the necessary assistance.

On arriving in town, however, Cyril had to admit that he had really no idea what he ought to do next. If he could only get in touch with an impoverished medical student who would agree to provide a body, the first and most difficult part of his undertaking would be achieved. But how and where was he to find this indispensable accomplice? Well, it was too late to do anything that evening, he decided. He might as well go to the club and get some dinner and try to dismiss the problem from his mind for the time being.

The first person he saw on entering the dining-

room was Campbell. He was sitting by himself at a small table; his round, rosy face depicted the utmost dejection and he thrust his fork through an oyster with much the same expression a man might have worn who was spearing a personal enemy.

On catching sight of Cyril, he dropped his fork, jumped from his seat, and made an eager step forward. Then, he suddenly wavered, evidently uncertain as to the reception Cyril was going to accord him.

"Well, this is a piece of luck!" cried Cyril, stretching out his hand.

Guy, looking decidedly sheepish, clasped it eagerly.

"I might as well tell you at once that I know I made no end of an ass of myself the other day," he said, averting his eyes from his friend's face. "It is really pretty decent of you not to have resented my ridiculous accusations."

"Oh, that's all right," Cyril assured him, "I quite understood your motive. But I am awfully glad you have changed your attitude towards me, for to tell you the truth, I am in great need of your assistance."

"Oh, Lor'!" ejaculated Campbell, screwing up his face into an expression of comic despair.

As soon as there was no danger of their being overheard, Cyril told Campbell of his interview with Judson. At first Guy could not be persuaded that the girl was Anita Wilmersley.

"She is not a liar, I am sure of it! If she said that her hair had turned white, it had turned white, and therefore it is impossible that she had dyed it," objected Campbell.

"Judson suggested that she dyed only part of her hair and that it was the rest which turned white."

Having finally convinced Guy that there was no doubt as to the girl's identity, Cyril proceeded to unfold his plan for rescuing her from the police.

Guy adjusted his eye-glass and stared at his friend speechless with consternation.

"This affair has turned your brain," he finally gasped. "Your plan is absurd, absolutely absurd, I tell you. Why, even if I could bribe some one to procure me a corpse, how on earth could you get it to Geralton?"

"In a motor-car."

"And where under Heaven are you to hide it?"

"Get me a corpse and I will arrange the rest," Cyril assured him with more confidence than he really felt.

"First you saddle me with a lot of stolen jewels and now you want me to travel around the country with a corpse under my arm! I say, you do select nice, pleasant jobs for me!" exclaimed Campbell.

"Have you any other plan to suggest?" asked Cyril.

"Can't say I have," acknowledged Guy.

"Are you willing to sit still and see Anita Wilmersley arrested?"

"Certainly not, but your scheme is a mad one —madder than anything I should have credited even you with having conceived." Campbell paused a moment as if considering the question in all its aspects. "However, the fact that it is crazy may save us. The police will not be likely to suspect two reputable members of society, whose sanity has so far not been doubted, of attempting to carry through such a wild, impossible plot. Yes," he mused, "the very

impossibility of the thing may make it possible."

"Glad you agree with me," cried Cyril enthusiastically. "Now how soon can you get a corpse, do you think?"

"Good Lord, man! You talk as if I could order one from Whiteley's. When can I get you a corpse—indeed? To-morrow—in a week—a month—a year—never. The last-mentioned date I consider the most likely. I will do what I can, that is all I can say; but how I am to go to work, upon my word, I have n't the faintest idea."

"You are an awfully clever chap, Guy."

"None of your blarney. I won't have it! I am the absolute fool, but I am still sane enough to know it."

"Very well, I 'll acknowledge that you are a fool and I only wish there were more like you," said Cyril, clapping his friend affectionately on the back.

"By the way," he added, turning away as if in search of a match and trying to speak as carelessly as possible, "How is Anita?"

For a moment Guy did not answer and Cyril

stood fumbling with the matches fearful of the effect of the question. He was still doubtful how far his friend had receded from his former position and was much relieved when Guy finally answered in a very subdued voice:

"She is pretty well—but—" He hesitated.

Cyril turned quickly round. He noticed that Guy's face had lengthened perceptibly and that he toyed nervously with his eye-glass.

"What is the matter?" he inquired anxiously.

"The fact is," replied Campbell, speaking slowly and carefully avoiding the other's eye, "I think it is possible that she misses you."

Cyril's heart gave a sudden jump.

"I can hardly believe it," he managed to stutter.

"Of course, Miss Trevor may be mistaken. It was her idea, not mine, that Ani—Lady Wilmersley I mean—is worrying over your absence. But whatever the cause, the fact remains that she has changed very much. She is no longer frank and cordial in her manner either to Miss Trevor or myself. It seems almost as if she regarded us both with suspicion, though what she can possibly suspect us of, I can't for the

life of me imagine. That day at lunch she was gay as a child, but now she is never anything but sad and preoccupied."

"Perhaps she is beginning to remember the past," suggested Cyril.

"How can I tell? Miss Trevor and I have tried everything we could think of to induce her to confide in us, but she won't. Possibly you might be more successful—" An involuntary sigh escaped Campbell. "I am sorry now that I prevented you from seeing her. Mind you, I still think it wiser not to do so, but I ought to have left you free to use your own judgment. The number of her sitting-room is 62, on the second floor and, for some reason or other, she insists on being left there alone every afternoon from three to four. Now I have told you all I know of the situation and you must handle it as you think best."

CHAPTER XVIII

A SLIP OF THE TONGUE

CYRIL spent the night in a state of pitiable indecision. Should he or should he not risk a visit to Anita? If the police were shadowing him, it would be fatal, but he had somehow lately acquired the conviction that they were not. On the other hand, if he could only see her, how it would simplify everything! As she distrusted both Guy and Miss Trevor, even if his plot succeeded, she would probably refuse to leave England unless he himself told her that he wished her to do so. Besides, there were so many details to be discussed, so many arrangements to be talked over. "Yes," he said to himself as he lay staring into the darkness, "it is my duty to see her. I shall go to her not because I want to . . ." A horrid doubt made him pause. Was he so sure that his decision was not the

outcome of his own desire? How could he trust his judgment in a matter where his inclinations were so deeply involved? Yet it would be shocking if he allowed his own feelings to induce him to do something which might be injurious to Anita. It was a nice question to determine whether her need of him was sufficient to justify him in risking a visit? For hours he debated with himself but could arrive at no conclusion. No sooner did he resolve to stay away from her than the thought of her unhappiness again made him waver. If he only knew why she was so unhappy, he told himself that the situation would not be so unendurable. When he had talked to her over the telephone, she had seemed cheerful; she had spoken of Guy and Miss Trevor with enthusiasm. What could have occurred since then to make her distrust them and to plunge her into such a state of gloom? As he tossed to and fro on his hot, tumbled bed, his imagination pictured one dire possibility after another, till at last he made up his mind that he could bear the uncertainty no longer. He must see her! He would see her!

Having reached this decision, Cyril could

hardly refrain from rushing off to her as soon as it was light. However, he had to curb his impatience. Three o'clock was the only hour he could be sure of finding her alone; so he must wait till three o'clock. But how on earth, he asked himself, was he going to get through the intervening time? He was in a state of feverish restlessness that was almost agony; he could not apply himself to anything; he could only wait—wait. Although he knew that there was no chance of his meeting Anita, he haunted the neighbourhood of the "George" all the morning. Every few minutes he consulted his watch and the progress of the hands seemed to him so incredibly slow that more than once he thought that it must have stopped altogether. Finally, finally, the hour struck.

Flinging back his shoulders and assuming a carelessness that almost amounted to a swagger, Cyril entered the hotel. He was so self-conscious that it was with considerable surprise as well as relief that he noticed that no one paid the slightest attention to him. Even the porter hardly glanced at him, being at the moment engaged in speeding a parting guest.

Cyril decided to use the stairs in preference to the lift, as they were less frequented than the latter, and as it happened, he made his way up to the second landing without encountering anybody.

There, however, he came face to face with a pretty housemaid, who to his dismay looked at him attentively. Cyril went cold all over. Had he but known it, she had been attracted by his tall, soldierly figure and had merely offered him the tribute of an admiring glance. But this explanation never occurred to our modest hero and he hurried, quite absurdly flustered by this trifling incident. He found that No. 62 opened on a small, ill-lighted hall, which was for the moment completely deserted.

Now that he actually stood on the threshold of Anita's room, Cyril felt a curious reluctance to proceed farther. It was unwise . . . She might not want to see him . . . But even as these objections flashed through his mind, he knocked almost involuntarily.

"Come in."

Yet he still hesitated. His heart was beating like a sledge-hammer and his hands were trem-

bling. Never had he experienced such a curious sensation before and he wondered vaguely what could be the matter with him.

"I can't stand here forever," he said in his heart. "I wanted to see her; well then, why don't I open the door? I am behaving like a fool!"

Still reasoning with himself, he finally entered the room.

A bright fire was burning on the hearth and before it were heaped a number of cushions and from this lowly seat Anita had apparently hastily arisen. The length of time he had taken to answer her summons had evidently alarmed her, for she stood like a creature at bay, her eyes wide open and frightened. On recognising Cyril a deep blush suffused her face and even coloured the whiteness of her throat.

"So it was you!" she exclaimed.

Her relief was obvious, yet her manner was distant, almost repellent. Cyril had confidently anticipated such a different reception that her unexpected coldness completed his discomfiture. He felt as if the foundations of his world were giving away beneath his feet. He man-

aged, however, to murmur something, he knew not what. The pounding of his heart prevented him from thinking coherently. When his emotion had subsided sufficiently for him to realise what he was doing, he found himself sitting stiffly on one side of the fire with Anita sitting equally stiffly on the other. She was talking—no, rather she was engaging him in polite conversation. How long she had been doing so he did not know, but he gathered that it could not have been long, as she was still on the subject of the weather.

"It has been atrocious in London. I hope you had better luck in the country. To-day has been especially disagreeable," she was saying.

Cyril abused the weather with a vigour which was rather surprising, in view of the fact that till she had mentioned it, he had been sublimely unconscious whether the sun had been shining or not. But finally even that prolific topic was exhausted and as no other apparently suggested itself to either, they relapsed into a constrained silence.

Cyril was suffering acutely. He had so longed to see her, and now an impalpable barrier had

somehow arisen between them which separated them more completely than mere bricks and mortar, than any distance could have done. True, he could feast his eyes on her cameo-like profile; on the soft curve of her cheek; on the long, golden-tipped lashes; on the slender, white throat, which rose like a column from the laces of her dress. But he dared not look at her too long. Cyril was not introspective and was only dimly aware of the cause of the turmoil which was raging in his heart. He did not know that he averted his eyes for fear that the primitive male within him would break loose from the fetters of his will and forcibly seize the small creature so temptingly within his reach.

"If I only knew what I have done to displease her!" he said to himself.

He longed to question her, but she held herself so rigidly aloof that he had not the courage to do so. It was in vain that he told himself that her coldness simplified the situation; that it would have been terrible to have had to repel her advances; but he could find no consolation in the thought. In speechless misery he sat gazing into the fire.

Suddenly he thrilled with the consciousness that she was looking at him. He turned towards her and their eyes met.

The glance they exchanged was of the briefest duration, but it sufficed to lift the weight which had been crushing him. He leaned eagerly forward.

"Have I offended you?" he asked.

The corners of her mouth quivered slightly, but she did not answer.

"If I have," he continued, "I assure you it was quite unintentionally. Why, I would give my life to save you a moment's pain. Can't you feel that I am speaking the truth?"

She turned her face towards him, and as he looked at her, Cyril realised that it was not only her manner which had altered; she herself had mysteriously altered. At first he could not define wherein the difference lay, but suddenly it flashed upon him. It was the expression of her eyes which had changed. Heretofore he had been confident that they reflected her every emotion; but now they were inscrutable. It was as if she had drawn a veil over her soul.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

There was more than a hint of hostility in her voice.

The evasion angered him.

"That is impossible! Why not be frank with me? If my visit is distasteful to you, you have only to say so and I will go."

As she did not immediately answer, he added:

"Perhaps I had better go." His tone, however, somehow implied more of a threat than a suggestion; for since they had exchanged that fleeting glance Cyril had felt unreasonably reassured. Despite her coldness, the memory of her tender entreaties for his speedy return, buoyed up his conceit. She could not be as indifferent to him as she seemed, he argued to himself. However, as the moments passed and she offered no objection to his leaving her, his newly-aroused confidence evaporated.

"She does not want me!" he muttered to himself. "I must go." But he made no motion to do so; he could not.

"I can't leave her till I know how I have offended her . . . There are so many arrangements to be made . . . I must get in touch with her again,—" were some of the excuses with which he

tried to convince himself that he had a right to linger.

He tried to read her face, but she had averted her head till he could see nothing but one small, pink ear, peeping from beneath her curls.

Her silence exasperated him.

"Why don't you speak to me? Why do you treat me like this?" he demanded almost fiercely.

"It is a little difficult to know how you wish to be treated!" Her manner was icy, but his relief was so intense that he scarcely noticed it.

"She is piqued!" he cried exultingly in his heart. "She is piqued, that is the whole trouble." He felt a man once more, master of the situation. "She probably expected me to—" He shrank from pursuing the thought any further as the hot blood surged to his face. He was again conscious of his helplessness. What could he say to her?

"Oh, if you could only understand!" he exclaimed aloud. "I suppose you think me cold and unfeeling? I only wish I were! . . . Oh, this is torture!"

She seemed startled by his vehemence, for she looked up at him timidly.

"Can't you trust me?" he continued. "Won't you tell me what has come between us?"

Two big tears gathered in her eyes.

The sight was too much for Cyril. Right and wrong ceased to exist for him. He forgot everything; stooping forward he gathered her into his arms and crushed her small body against his heart.

She thrust him from her with unexpected force and stood before him with blazing eyes.

"You cannot treat me like a child, who can be neglected one day and fondled the next! I won't have it! At the nursing home I was too weak and confused to realise how strangely you were behaving, but now I know. You dare to complain of my coldness—my coldness indeed! Is my coldness a match to yours? Why do you suddenly pretend to love me?"

He interrupted her with a vigorous protest.

"If you do, then your conduct is all the more inexplicable. If you do, then I ask you, what is it, who is it, that stands between us?"

"If I could tell you, don't you suppose I would?" declared Cyril.

"Then there is some one, some person who is keeping us apart!"

"No—oh, not exactly."

"Ah, you see, you can't deny it! There is another woman in your life. I know it! I felt it!"

"No—no! I love you!" cried Cyril.

He hardly knew what he was saying; the words seemed to have leaped to his lips.

She regarded him for a second in silence evidently only partially convinced.

Cyril felt horribly guilty. He had momentarily forgotten his wife, and although he tried to convince himself that he had spoken the truth and that it was not she who was keeping them apart, yet he had to acknowledge that if he had been free, he would certainly have behaved very differently towards Anita. So in a sense he had lied to her and as he realised this, his eyes sank before hers. She did not fail to note his embarrassment and pressed her point inexorably.

"Swear that there is no other woman who has a claim on you and I will believe you."

He could not lie to her in cold blood. Yet

to tell her the truth was also out of the question, he said to himself.

While he still hesitated, she continued more vehemently.

"I don't ask you to tell me anything of your past or my past, if you had rather not do so. One thing, however, I must and will know—who is this woman and what are her pretensions?"

"I—I cannot tell you," he said at last. "I only wish I could. Some day, I promise you, you shall know everything, but now it is impossible. But this much I will say—I love you as I have never loved any one in my whole life."

She trembled from head to foot and half closed her eyes.

For a moment neither spoke. Cyril felt that this very silence established a communion between them, more complete, more intense than any words could have done. But as he gazed at the small, drooping figure, he felt that his self-control was deserting him completely. He almost reeled with the violence of his emotion.

"I can't stand it another moment," he said to himself. "I must go before—" He did not

finish the sentence but clenched his hands till the knuckles showed white through the skin.

He rose to his feet.

"I can't stay!" he exclaimed aloud. "Forgive me, Anita. I can't tell you what I feel. Good-bye!" He murmured incoherently and seizing her hands, he pressed them for an instant against his lips, then dropping them abruptly, he fled from the room.

Cyril in his excitement had not noticed that he had called Anita by her name nor did he perceive the start she gave when she heard it. After the door had clicked behind him, she sat as if turned to stone, white to her very lips.

Slowly, as if with an effort, her lips moved.

"Anita?" she whispered to herself. "Anita?" she repeated over and over again as if she were trying to learn a difficult lesson.

Suddenly a great light broke over her face.

"I am Anita Wilmersley!" she cried aloud.

But the tension had been too great; with a little gasp she sank fainting to the floor.

CHAPTER XIX

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

WHAT he did during the next few hours, Cyril never quite knew. He retained a vague impression of wandering through endless streets and of being now and then arrested in his heedless course by the angry imprecations of some wayfarer he had inadvertently jostled or of some Jehu whose progress he was blocking.

How could he have behaved like such a fool, he kept asking himself. He had not said a thing to Anita that he had meant to say—not one. Worse still, he had told her that he loved her! He had even held her in his arms! Cyril tried not to exult at the thought. He told himself again and again that he had acted like a cad; nevertheless the memory of that moment filled him with triumphant rapture. Had he lost all sense of shame, he wondered. He tried to con-

sider Anita's situation, his own situation; but he could not. Anita herself absorbed him. He could think neither of the past nor of the future; he could think of nothing connectedly.

The daylight waned and still he tramped steadily onward. Finally, however, his body began to assert itself. His footsteps grew gradually slower, till at last he realised that he was miles from home and that he was completely exhausted. Hailing a passing conveyance, he drove to his lodgings.

He was still so engrossed in his dreams that he felt no surprise at finding Peter sitting in the front hall, nor did he notice the dejected droop of the latter's shoulders.

On catching sight of his master, Peter sprang forward.

"Hsh! My lord," he whispered with his finger on his lip; and turning slightly, he cast an apprehensive glance over his shoulder towards the top of the stairs.

With an effort Cyril shook off his preoccupation. Following the direction of his servant's eyes, he saw nothing more alarming than a few dusty plants which were supposed to adorn the

small landing where the stairs turned. Before he had time to form a conjecture as to the cause of Peter's agitation, the latter continued breathlessly: "Her Ladyship 'ave arrived, my lord!"

Having made this announcement, he stepped back as if to watch what effect this information would have on his master. There was no doubt that Peter's alarm was very genuine, yet one felt that in spite of it he was enjoying the dramatic possibilities of the situation.

Cyril, however, only blinked at him uncomprehendingly.

"Her Ladyship? What Ladyship?" he asked.

"Lady Wilmersley, my lord, and she brought her baggage. I have n't known what to do, that I have n't. I knew she ought not to stay here, but I could n't turn 'er out, could I?"

Cyril's mind was so full of Anita that he never doubted that it was she to whom Peter was referring, so without waiting to ask further questions, he rushed upstairs two steps at a time, and threw open the door of his sitting-room.

On a low chair in front of the fire his wife sat reading quietly.

Cyril staggered back as if he had been struck.

She, however, only turned her head languidly and closing her book, surveyed him with a mocking smile.

For a moment Cyril saw red. His disappointment added fuel to his indignation.

"Amy! How dare you come here?" he cried, striding towards her.

She seemed in nowise affected by his anger; only her expression became, if possible, a trifle more contemptuous.

"Your manners have sadly deteriorated since we parted," she remarked, raising her eyebrows superciliously.

"Manners!" he exclaimed and his voice actually shook with rage. "May I ask how you expected to be received? Is it possible that you imagine that I am going to take you back?"

Her eyes narrowed, but she still appeared quite unconcerned.

"Do you know, I rather think you will," she drawled.

"Take you back, now that you have tired of your lover or he has become disgusted with you, which is probably nearer the truth. Do you think I am mad, or are you?"

He fancied that he saw her wince, but she replied calmly:

"Do not let us indulge in mutual recriminations. They are so futile."

"Mutual recriminations, indeed! I like that! What have you to reproach me with? Did n't I marry you to save you from disgrace and penury? Have n't I done everything I could to keep you straight?"

She rose slowly from her seat and he noticed for the first time that she wore a low-cut gown of some diaphanous material, which revealed and yet softened the too delicate lines of her sinuous figure. Her black hair lay in thick waves around her face, completely covering the ears, and wound in a coil at the back of her neck. He had never seen it arranged in this fashion and reluctantly he had to admit that it was strangely becoming to her. A wide band of dull gold, set with uncut gems, encircled her head and added a barbaric note to her exotic beauty. It was his last gift to her, he remembered.

Yes, she was still beautiful, he acknowledged, although the life she had led, had left its marks upon her. She looked older and frailer than

when he had seen her last. But to-night the sunken eyes glowed with extraordinary brilliancy and a soft colour gave a certain roundness to her hollow cheeks. As she stood before him, Cyril was conscious, for the first time in years, of the alluring charm of her personality.

She regarded him for a moment, her full red lips parted in an inscrutable smile. How well he recalled that smile! He could never fathom its meaning. In some mysterious way it suggested infinite possibilities. How he hated it!

"You tried everything, I grant you," she said at last, "except the one thing which would have proved efficacious."

"And what was that, pray?"

"You never loved me."

Her unexpected accusation made Cyril pause. Yes, it was true, he acknowledged to himself. Had he not realised it during the last few days as he had never done before?

"You don't even take the trouble to deny it," she continued. "You married me out of pity and instead of being ashamed of it, you actually pride yourself on the purity of your motive."

"Well, at any rate I can't see what there was to be ashamed of," he replied indignantly.

"Of course you can't! Oh, how you good people exasperate me! You seem to lack all comprehension of the natural cravings of a normal human being. Pity? What did I want with pity? I wanted love!"

"It was not my fault that I could not love you."

"No, but knowing that you did not love me, it was dastardly of you to have married me without telling me the truth. In doing so, you took from me my objective in life—you destroyed my ideals. Oh, don't look so sceptical, you fool! Can't you see that I should never have remained a governess until I was twenty-five, if I had not had ideals? It was because I had such lofty conceptions of love that I kept myself scrupulously aloof from men, so that I might come to my mate, when I found him, with soul, mind, and body unsullied."

She spoke with such passionate sincerity that it was with an effort Cyril reminded himself that her past had not been as blameless as she pictured it.

"Your fine ideals did not prevent you from becoming a drunkard—" he remarked drily.

"When I married, I was not a drunkard," she vehemently protested. "The existence I led was abhorrent to me, and it is true that occasionally when I felt I could not stand it another moment, I would go to my room after dinner and get what comfort I could out of alcohol; but what I did, I did deliberately and not to satisfy an ungovernable appetite. I was no more a drunkard than a woman who takes a dose of morphine during bodily agony is a drug fiend. Of course, my conduct seems inexcusable to you, for you are quite incapable of understanding the torture my life was to me."

"Other women have suffered far greater misfortunes and have borne them with fortitude and dignity."

"Look at me, Cyril; even now am I like other women?" She drew herself up proudly. "Was it my fault that I was born with beauty that demanded its due? Was I to blame that my blood leaped wildly through my veins, that my imagination was always on fire? But I was, and still am, instinctively and fundamentally a

virtuous woman. Oh, you may sneer, but it is true! Although as a girl I was starving for love, I never accepted passion as a substitute, and you can't realise how incessantly the latter was offered me. Wherever I went, I was persecuted by it. At times I had a horrible fear that desire was all that I was capable of evoking; and when you came to me in my misery, poverty, and disgrace, I hailed you as my king—my man! I believed that you were offering me a love so great that it welcomed the sacrifice of every minor consideration. It never occurred to me that you would dare to ask me for myself, my life, my future, unless you were able to give me in exchange something more than the mere luxuries of existence."

"I also offered you my life——"

"You did not!" she interrupted him. "You offered up your life, not to me, but to your own miserable conception of chivalry. The greatness of your sacrifice intoxicated you and consequently it seemed to you inevitable that I also would spend the rest of my days in humble contemplation of your sublime character?"

"Such an idea never occurred to me," Cyril angrily objected.

"Oh, you never formulated it in so many words, I know that! You are too self-conscious to be introspective and are actually proud of the fact that you never stop to analyse either yourself or your motives. So you go blundering through life without in the least realising what are the influences which shape your actions. You fancy that you are not self-centred because you are too shy, yes, and too vain to probe the hidden recesses of your heart. You imagine that you are unselfish because you make daily sacrifices to your own ideal of conduct. But of that utter forgetfulness of self, of that complete merging and submerging of your identity in another's, you have never had even the vaguest conception.. When you married me, it never occurred to you that I had the right to demand both love and comprehension. You, the idealist, expected me to be satisfied with the material advantages you offered; but I, the degraded creature you take me to be, had I known the truth, would never have consented to sell my birthright for a mess of pottage."

"That sounds all very fine, and I confess I may not have been a perfect husband, but after all, what would you have done, I should like to know, if I had not married you?"

"Done? I would have worked and hoped, and if work had failed me, I would have begged and hoped. I would even have starved, before abandoning the hope that some day I should find the man who was destined for me. When I at last realised that you did not love me, you cannot imagine my despair. I consumed myself in futile efforts to please you, but the very intensity of my love prevented me from exercising those arts and artifices which might have brought you to my feet. My emotion in your presence was so great that it sealed my lips and made you find me a dull companion."

"I never thought you dull. You know very well that it was not that which alienated me from you. When I married you, I may not have been what is called in love with you, but I was certainly fond of you, and if you had behaved yourself, I should no doubt in time have become more closely united to you. You talk of 'consuming' yourself to please me. Nice, effective

word, that! I must add it to my vocabulary. But you chose a strange means of gaining my affections when you took to disgracing yourself both privately and publicly."

The passionate resentment which had transfigured her slowly faded from Amy's face, leaving it drawn and old; her voice, when she spoke, sounded infinitely weary.

"When I knew for a certainty that a lukewarm affection was all you would ever feel for me, I lost hope, and in losing hope, I lost my foothold on life. I wanted to die—I determined to die. Time and time again, I pressed your pistol to my forehead, but something stronger than my will always prevented me from pulling the trigger; and finally I sought forgetfulness in drink, because I had not the courage to find it in death. At first I tried to hide my condition from you, but there came a moment when the sight of your bland self-satisfaction became unbearable, when your absolute unconsciousness of the havoc you had made of my life maddened me. I wanted you to suffer! Oh, not as I had suffered, you are not capable of that; but at any rate I could hurt your vanity and deal a

death-blow to your pride! You had disgraced me when you tricked me into giving myself to a man who did not love me; I determined to disgrace you by reeling through the public streets. And I was glad, glad!" she cried with indescribable bitterness. "When I saw you grow pale with anger, when I saw you tremble with shame, I suppose you fancy that I must, at times, have suffered from remorse and humiliation? I swear that never for a moment have I regretted the course I chose. I am ashamed of nothing except that I lacked the courage to kill myself. Drink? I bless it! How I welcomed the gradual deadening of my senses, the dulling of my fevered brain! When I awoke from my long torpor and found myself at Charleroi, I cursed the doctor who had brought me back to life. Little by little the old agony returned. The thought of you haunted me day and night, while a raging thirst racked my body, and from this twofold torture the constant supervision of the nurses prevented me from obtaining even a temporary respite. It was hell!"

For a moment Cyril felt a wave of pity sweep over him, but suddenly he stiffened.

"You forget to mention that—consolation was offered you."

"Consolation! Had I found that, I should not be here! I admit, however, that when I first noticed that M. de Brissac was attracted by me, I was mildly pleased. It was a solace to my wounded vanity to find that some one still found me desirable. But I swear that it never even occurred to me to give myself to him, till the doctor told me that you were coming to take me away with you. See you again? Subject myself anew to your indifference—your contempt? Never! So I took the only means of escaping from you which offered itself. And I am glad, glad that I flung myself into the mire, for by defiling love, I killed it. I am at last free from the obsession which has been the torment of my life. Neither you nor any other man will again fire my imagination or stir my senses. I am dead, but I am also free—free!"

As she spoke the last words her expression was so exalted that Cyril was forced to grant her his grudging admiration. As she stood before him, she seemed more a spirit than a woman; she seemed the incarnation of life, of love, of

the very fundamentals of existence. She was really an extraordinary woman; why did he not love her, he asked himself. But even as this flashed through his mind the memory of his long martyrdom obtruded itself. He saw her again not as she appeared then, but as the central figure in a succession of loathsome scenes.

"Your attempt to justify yourself may impose on others, but not on me. I know you too well! You are rotten to the core. What you term love is nothing but an abnormal craving, which no healthy-minded man with his work in life to do could have possibly satisfied. Our code, however, is too different for me to discuss the matter with you. And so, if you have quite finished expatiating on my shortcomings, would you kindly tell me to what I owe the honour of your visit?"

She turned abruptly from him and leaned for a minute against the mantelpiece; then, sinking into a chair, she took a cigarette from a box which lay on the table near her and proceeded to light it with apparent unconcern. Cyril, however, noticed that her hand trembled violently. After inhaling a few puffs, she threw her head

back and looked at him tauntingly from between her narrowed lids.

"Because, my dear Cyril, I read in yesterday's paper that your wife had been your companion on your ill-timed journey from Paris. So I thought it would be rather amusing to run over and find out a few particulars as to the young person who is masquerading under my name."

She had caught Cyril completely off his guard and he felt for a moment incapable of parrying her attack.

"I assure you," he stuttered, "it is all a mistake—" He hesitated; he could think of no explanation which would satisfy her.

"I expected you to tell me that she was as pure as snow!" she exclaimed with a scornful laugh. "But how you with your puritanic ideas managed to get yourself into such an imbroglio passes my understanding. Really, I consider that you owe it to me, to satisfy my curiosity."

"I regret that I am unable to do so."

"So do I! Still, as I shall no doubt solve the riddle in a few days, I can possess my soul in patience. Meanwhile I shall enjoy watching

your efforts to prevent me from learning the truth."

"Unfortunately for you, that pleasure will be denied you. You are going to leave this house at once and we shall not meet again till we do so before judge and jury."

Amy settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

"So you will persist in trying to bluff it out? Foolish Cyril! Don't you realise that I hold all the cards and that I am quite clever enough to use them to the best advantage? You see, knowing you as I do, I am convinced that the motive which led you to sacrifice both truth and honour is probably as praiseworthy as it is absurd. But having made such a sacrifice, why are you determined to render it useless? I cannot believe that you are willing to face the loss not only of your own reputation but of that of the young person who has accepted your protection. How do you fancy she would enjoy figuring as corespondent in a divorce suit?"

Cyril felt as if he were caught in a trap.

"My God," he cried, "you would n't do that! I swear to you that she is absolutely innocent.

She was in a terrible situation and to say that she was my wife seemed the only way to save her. She does n't even know I am married!"

"Really? And have you never considered that when she finds out the truth, she may fail to appreciate the delicacy which no doubt prevented you from mentioning the trifling fact of my existence? It is rather funny that your attempts to rescue forlorn damsels seem doomed to be unsuccessful! Or were your motives in this case not quite so impersonal as I fancied? Has Launcelot at last found his Guinevere? If so, I may yet be avenged vicariously."

"Your presence is punishment enough, I assure you, for all the sins I ever committed! But come to the point. What exactly is it that you are threatening me with?"

"Publicity, that is all. If neither you nor this woman object to its being known that you travelled together as man and wife, then I am powerless."

"But you have just acknowledged that you know that our relation is a harmless one," cried Cyril.

"I do not know it—but—yes, I believe it.

Do you think, however, that any one else will do so?"

"Surely you would not be such a fiend as to wreck the life of an innocent young girl?"

"If her life is wrecked, whose fault is it? Not mine, at all events. It was you who by publicly proclaiming her to be your wife, made it impossible for her disgrace to remain a secret. Don't you realise that even if I took no steps in the matter, sooner or later the truth is bound to be discovered? Now I—and I alone—can save you from the consequences of your folly. If you will agree not to divorce me, I promise not only to keep your secret, but to protect the good name of this woman by every means in my power."

"I should like to know what you expect to gain by trying to force me to take you back? Is it the title that you covet, or do you long to shine in society? But remember that in order to do that, you would have radically to reform your habits."

"I have no intention of reforming and I don't care a fig for conventional society!"

"You tell me that you no longer love me and that you found existence with me unsupport-

able. Why then are you not willing to end it?"

"It is true, I no longer love you, but while I live, no other woman shall usurp my place."

"Your place! When you broke your marriage vows, you forfeited your right to a place in my life. But I will make a compact with you. You can have all the money you can possibly want as long as you neither do nor say anything to imperil the reputation of the young lady in question."

"All the wealth in the world could not buy my silence!"

"This is too horrible!" cried Cyril almost beside himself. "In order to shield a poor innocent child, you demand that I sacrifice my freedom, my future, even my honour? Have you no sense of justice, no pity?"

"None. I have said my last word. It is now for you to decide whether I am to go or stay. Well—which is it to be?"

Cyril looked into her white, set face; what he read there destroyed his last, lingering hope.

"Stay," he muttered through his clenched teeth.

CHAPTER XX

"I KNOW IT, COUSIN CYRIL"

CYRIL leaned wearily back in his chair. He was in that state of apathetic calm which sometimes succeeds a violent emotion. Of his wife he had neither seen or heard anything since they parted the night before.

"My lord!"

Cyril started, for he had not noticed Peter's entrance and the suppressed excitement of the latter's manner alarmed him.

"What is the matter now?" he demanded.

"She 's 'ere, my lord," replied Peter, dropping his voice till it was almost a whisper.

Cyril sprang from his seat.

"Who?" he cried. "Speak up, can't you?"

"The—the young lady, my lord, as you took charge of on the train. I was just passing through the 'all as she came in and so——"

"Here?" exclaimed Cyril. "Why did n't you show her up at once?"

"But, my lord," objected Peter. "If 'er Ladyship should 'ear——"

"Mind your own business, you fool, or——"

But Peter had already scuttled out of the room.

Cyril waited, every nerve strung to the highest tension. Was he again to be disappointed? Yet if his visitor was really Anita, some new misfortune must have occurred! It seemed to him ages before the door again opened and admitted a small, cloaked figure, whose features were practically concealed by a heavy veil. A glance, however, sufficed to assure him that it was indeed Anita who stood before him. While Cyril was struggling to regain his composure, she lifted her veil. The desperation of her eyes appalled him.

"My God, what is the matter?" cried Cyril, striding forward and seizing her hands.

She gently disengaged herself.

"Lord Wilmersley—" Cyril jumped as if he had been shot. "Yes," she continued, "I know who you are. I also know who I am."

"But who told you?" stuttered Cyril.

"You did," she quietly replied.

"I? What do you mean?"

For the first time the ghost of a smile hovered round her lips.

"You called me Anita! You didn't know that, did you?"

"Did I really? What a blundering fool I have been from first to last!" Cyril exclaimed remorsefully.

"You need not reproach yourself. For some days I had been haunted by fragmentary visions of the past and before I saw you yesterday, I was practically certain that you were not my husband. Oh! It was not without a struggle that I finally made up my mind that you had deceived me. I told myself again and again that you were not the sort of a man who would take advantage of an unprotected girl; yet the more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that my suspicions were correct. Then I tried to imagine what reason you could have for posing as my husband, but I could think of none. I was in despair! I didn't know what to do, whom to turn to; for if I could not trust you, whom could I trust? When I heard my

name, it was as if a dim light suddenly flooded my brain. I knew who I was. I remembered leaving Geralton, but little by little I realised with dismay that I was still completely in the dark as to who you were, why you had come into my life. It seemed to me that if I could not discover the truth, I should go mad. Then I decided to appeal to Miss Trevor. She was a woman. She looked kind. She would tell me! I was somehow convinced that she did not know who I was, but I said to myself that she would certainly have heard of my disappearance, for I could not believe that Arthur had allowed me to go out of his life without moving heaven and earth to find me."

"You did not know——?"

Anita shook her head.

"No; it was Miss Trevor who told me that Arthur was dead—that he had been murdered." She shuddered convulsively. "You see," she added with pathetic humility, "there are still so many things I do not remember. Even now I can hardly believe that I, I of all people, killed my husband." Great tears coursed slowly down her checks.

Cyril ached for pity of her.

"Why take it for granted that you did?" he suggested, partly from a desire to comfort her, but also because there really lingered a doubt in his mind.

"Do you suspect any one else?" she cried.

"Not at present, but——"

She threw up her hands with a gesture of despair. "No, of course not. I must have killed him. But I never meant to—you will believe that, won't you? Those doctors were right, I must have been insane!"

"I am sure you were not. Arthur only intended to frighten you by sending for those men."

"But if I was not crazy, why can I remember so little of what took place on that dreadful night and for some time afterwards?"

"I am told that a severe shock often has that effect," replied Cyril. "But, oh, how I wish you could answer a few questions! I don't want to raise your hopes; but there is one thing that has always puzzled me and till that is explained I for one shall always doubt whether it was you who killed Arthur."

Again the eager light leaped into her eyes.

"Oh, tell me quickly what—what makes you think that I may not have done so?"

Cyril contemplated her a moment in silence. He longed to pursue the topic, but was fearful of the effect it might have on her.

"Yet now that she knows the worst, it may be a relief to her to talk about it," he said to himself. "Yes, I will risk it," he finally decided.

"Do you remember that you put a drug in Arthur's coffee?" he asked out loud.

"Yes, perfectly."

"Then you must have expected to make your escape before he regained consciousness."

"Yes—yes!"

"Then why did you arm yourself with a pistol?"

"I did n't! I had no pistol."

"But if you shot Arthur, you must have had a pistol."

She stared at Cyril in evident bewilderment.

"I could have sworn I had no pistol."

Cyril tried to control his rising excitement. "You knew, however, that Arthur owned one?"

"Yes, but I never knew where he kept it."

"You are sure you have not forgotten——"

"No, no!" she interrupted him. "My memory is perfectly clear up to the time when Arthur seized me and threw me on the floor."

"After that you remember nothing?"

"Oh, yes, I have a vague recollection of a long walk through the dark—of a train—of you—of policemen. But everything is so confused that I can be sure of nothing."

Cyril paced the room deep in thought.

"It seems to me incredible," he said at last, "that if you did not even know where to look for a pistol, you should have found it, to say nothing of having been able to use it, while you were being beaten into unconsciousness by that brute."

But Anita only shook her head hopelessly.

"It is extraordinary, and yet I must have done so. For it has been proved, has it not, that Arthur and I were absolutely alone?"

"Certainly not! How can we be sure that some one was not concealed in the room or did not climb in through the window or—why, there are a thousand possibilities which can never be proved!"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, her whole body trembling with eagerness. "I now remember that I had put all my jewels in a bag, and as that has disappeared, a burglar—" But as she scanned Cyril's face, she paused.

"You had the bag with you at the nursing home. The jewels are safe," he said very gently.

"Then," she cried, "it is useless trying to deceive ourselves any longer—I killed Arthur and must face the consequences."

"What do you mean?"

"I have decided to give myself up."

"You shall not! I will not allow it!" he cried.

"But don't you see that I can't spend the rest of my life in hiding? Think what it would mean to live in daily, hourly dread of exposure? Why, death would be preferable to that."

"Oh, you would be acquitted. There is no doubt of that. That is not what I am afraid of. But the idea of you, Anita, in prison. Why, it is out of the question. A week of it would kill you."

"And if it did, what of it? What has life to offer me now?"

"Give me time. I will find some way of saving you. I will do anything—everything."

"There is nothing you can do," she said, laying her hand gently on his arm. "You have already risked too much. Oh, I can never thank you enough for all your goodness to me!"

"Don't—don't—I would gladly give my life for you!"

"I know it, Cousin Cyril," she murmured, with downcast eyes. A wave of colour swept for a moment over her face.

Cyril shivered. With a mighty effort he strove to regain his composure. Cousin Cyril! Yes, that was what he was to her—that was all he could ever be to her.

"I know how noble, how unselfish you are," she continued, lifting her brimming eyes to his. "But your life is not your own. We must both remember that."

"Both? Anita, is it possible that you——"

"Hush! I have said too much. Let me go," she cried, for Cyril had seized her hand and was covering it with kisses.

At this moment the door-handle rattled. Cyril and Anita moved hurriedly away from each other.

"Inspector Griggs is 'ere, my lord."

Peter's face had resumed its usual stolid expression. He appeared not to notice that his master and the latter's guest were standing in strained attitudes at opposite ends of the room.

"I can't see him." Cyril motioned Peter impatiently away.

"Why did n't you see the inspector?" exclaimed Anita. "This is the best time for me to give myself up."

"No, no! I have a plan——"

He was interrupted by the reappearance of Peter.

"The inspector is very sorry, my lord, but he has to see you at once, 'e says."

"I can't," began Cyril.

"It is no use putting it off," Anita said firmly. "I insist on your seeing him. If you don't, I shall go down and speak to him myself."

Cyril did not know what to do. He could not argue with her before Peter. So turning to the latter, he said:

"You can bring him up in ten minutes—not before. You understand?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Anita," implored Cyril, as soon as they were again alone, "I beg you not to do this thing. If a plan that I have in mind succeeds, you will be able to leave the country and begin life again under another name."

She hesitated a moment.

"What is this plan?"

He outlined it briefly.

She listened attentively, but when he had finished she shook her head.

"I will not allow you to attempt it. If your fraud were discovered—and it would surely be discovered—your life would be ruined."

"No—" he began.

"I tell you I will not hear of it. No, I am determined to end this horrible suspense. Call the inspector."

"I entreat you at all events to wait a little while longer."

"No, no!"

Cyril was almost frantic. The minutes were slipping past. Was there nothing he could say to turn her from her purpose?

"My wife is here. If she should hear, if she should know—" he began tentatively.

He was amazed at the effect of his words.

"Why did n't you tell me that she was here?" exclaimed Anita with flashing eyes. "Of course, I have n't the slightest intention of involving her in my affairs. I will go at once."

"But you can't leave the house without Griggs seeing you, and he would certainly guess who you are. Stay in the next room till he is gone, that is all I ask of you. Here, quick, I hear footsteps on the stairs."

Cyril had hardly time to fling himself into a chair before the inspector was announced.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRUTH

"GOOD-MORNING, my lord. Rather early to disturb you, I am afraid."

Cyril noticed that Griggs's manner had undergone a subtle change. Although perfectly respectful, he seemed to hold himself rigidly aloof. There was even a certain solemnity about his trivial greeting. Cyril felt that another blow was impending. Instantly and instinctively he braced himself to meet it.

"Not at all. What can I do for you?" he replied in his usual quiet voice.

The man hesitated a moment.

"The fact is, my lord, I should like to ask you a few questions, but I warn you that your answers may be used against you."

"I have nothing to fear. What is it you want to know?"

"Have you missed a bag, my lord?"

"That confounded bag! It has turned up at last," thought Cyril. What on earth should he say? How much did the fellow guess?

"You had better ask my man. He knows more about my things than I do," he managed to answer, as he lifted a perfectly expressionless face to Griggs's inspection.

"Quite so, my lord. But I fancy that as far as this particular bag is concerned, that is not the case."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not see what reason he could have had for hiding one of his master's bags up the chimney."

"So the bag was found up the chimney? Will you tell me what motive I am supposed to have had for wishing to conceal it? Is there anything remarkable about it? Did it contain anything you thought I might want to get rid of?"

The inspector eyed him narrowly.

"It 's no use, my lord. We know that Priscilla Prentice bought this bag a fortnight ago in Newhaven. Now, if you are able to explain

how it came into your possession, I would strongly advise your doing so."

Still Cyril did not flinch.

"I have never to my knowledge laid eyes on the girl, and I cannot, therefore, believe that a bag of hers has been found here."

"We can prove it," replied the inspector. "The maker's name is inside and the man who sold it to her is willing to swear that it is the identical bag. One of our men has made friends with your chamber-maid and she confessed that she had discovered it stuffed up the chimney in your bedroom. She is a stupid girl and thought you had thrown it away, so she took it. Only afterwards, it occurred to her that you had a purpose in placing the bag where she had found it and she was going to return it when my man prevented her from doing so."

"Very remarkable! It all fits together like clock-work. I congratulate you, Inspector," said Cyril, trying to speak superciliously. "But you omitted to mention the most important link in the chain of evidence you have so cleverly forged against me," he continued. "How am I supposed to have got hold of this bag? I did not

stop in Newhaven and you have had me so closely watched that you must know that since my arrival in England I have met no one who could have given it to me."

"No, my lord, we are by no means sure of this. Quite the contrary. It is true that we have, so to speak, kept an eye on you, but, till yesterday, we had no reason to suspect that you had any connection with the murder, so we did not think it necessary to have you closely followed. There have been hours when we have had no idea where you were."

"You surprise me!"

"It is quite possible," continued the inspector without heeding Cyril's interruption, "that you have met either Prentice or Lady Wilmersley, the dowager, I mean."

"Really! And why should they have given this bag to me, of all people? Surely you must see that they could have found many easier, as well as safer, ways of disposing of it."

"Quite so, my lord, and that is why I am inclined to believe that it was not through either of them that the bag came into your possession.

I think it more probable that her Ladyship brought it with her."

"Her Ladyship? What do you mean?" Cyril's voice grew suddenly harsh.

"You told me yourself that her Ladyship met you in Newhaven; that, in fact, she had spent the night of the murder there."

Cyril clutched the table convulsively.

Amy! They suspected Amy. This was too horrible! Why had it never occurred to him that his lies might involve an innocent person?

"But this is absurd, you know," he stammered, in a futile effort to gain time.

"Let us hope so, my lord."

"There has been a terrible mistake, I tell you."

"In that case her Ladyship can no doubt easily explain it."

"Her Ladyship is ill. She cannot be disturbed."

"I am afraid that cannot be avoided. I must see her at once. But if you wish it, I will not question her till she has been examined by our doctors."

Cyril rose and moved automatically towards the door.

The inspector stepped forward.

"Sorry, my lord, but for the present you can see her Ladyship only before witnesses. May I ring the bell?"

"What is the use of asking my permission? You are master here, so it seems," exclaimed Cyril. His nerves were at last getting beyond his control.

"I am only doing my duty and I assure you that I want to cause as little unpleasantness as possible."

A servant appeared.

The inspector remained discreetly in the background.

"Ask her Ladyship please to come here as soon as she can get ready. If she is asleep, it will be necessary to wake her."

"Very good, my lord."

The two men sat facing each other in silence.

Cyril was hardly conscious of the other's presence. He must think; he knew he must think; but his brain seemed paralysed. There must be a way of clearing his wife without casting suspicion on Anita. Yet he could think of none. Was it possible that he was now called upon

to choose between the woman he hated and the woman he loved, between honour and dishonour? No, there must be a middle course. Time would surely solve the difficulty.

The door opened and Amy came slowly into the room. She looked desperately ill.

She was wrapped in a red velvet dressing-gown and its warm colour contrasted painfully with the greyness of her face and lips. On catching sight of the inspector, she started, but controlling herself with an obvious effort, she turned to her husband.

"You wish to speak to me?"

"You can see for yourself, Inspector, that her Ladyship is in no condition to be questioned," remonstrated Cyril, moving quickly to his wife's side.

"Just as you say, my lord, but in that case her Ladyship had better finish her dressing. It will be necessary for her to accompany me to headquarters."

"I will not allow it," cried Cyril, almost beside himself and throwing a protecting arm around Amy's shoulders.

Her bloodshot eyes rested a moment on her

husband, then gently disengaging herself, she drew herself to her full height and faced the inspector.

"What is the matter? You need not try to spare me."

"His Lordship——"

"Do not listen to his Lordship. It is I who demand to be told the truth."

"Amy, I beg you—" interposed Cyril.

"No, no," she cried, shaking off her husband's hand. "Let me know the worst. Don't you see that you are torturing me?"

"There has been a mistake. It is all my fault," began Cyril.

She silenced him with an imperious gesture.

"I am waiting to hear what the inspector has to say."

Griggs cast a questioning look at Cyril, which the latter answered by a helpless shrug.

"A bag has been found in his Lordship's chimney, which was lately purchased in Newhaven. Do you know how it got there? But perhaps before answering, you may wish to consult your legal adviser."

She cast a quick glance at her husband.

"I will neither acknowledge nor deny anything until I have seen this bag and know of what I am accused," she answered after a barely perceptible pause.

Griggs opened the door and called:

"Jones, the bag, please."

The inspector handed it to Amy.

She looked at it for a moment. Cyril watched her breathlessly. What would she say? Had the moment come when he must proclaim the truth?

"Am I supposed to have bought this bag?" she asked.

"No, my lady. It was sold to Prentice, who was sempstress at Geralton and we believe it is the one in which Lady Wilmersley carried off her jewels."

Amy gave a muffled exclamation, but almost instantly she regained her composure.

"If that is so, how do you connect me with it? Because it happens to have been found here, do you accuse me of having robbed my cousin?"

"No, my lady, but as you spent the night of the murder in Newhaven——"

To Cyril's surprise she shuddered from head to foot.

"No, no!" she cried, stretching out her hands as if to ward off a blow.

"It is useless to deny it. His Lordship himself told me that you had joined him there."

"I lied! It was not her Ladyship who was with me. Her Ladyship was in Paris at the time. I swear it on my honour. The bag is —is mine. You can arrest me. I am guilty." Thank God, thought Cyril, he had at last found a way of saving both his love and his honour.

"Guilty of what, my lord? Of a murder which was committed while you were still in France—" asked Griggs, lifting his eyebrows incredulously.

"Yes! I mean I instigated it—I hated my cousin—I needed the money, so I hired an accomplice. He bungled things. I give myself up. I confess. What more do you want?" cried Cyril.

"Not so fast, my lord. Of course, if you insist upon it, I shall have to arrest you, but I don't believe you had anything more to do with the murder than I had, and I would stake my reputation on your being as straight a gentleman as I ever met professionally. Wait a bit,

my lord, don't be 'asty." In his excitement Griggs dropped one of his carefully guarded aitches.

The door opened.

"Mr. Campbell, my lord."

"Guy," exclaimed Cyril. "You have arrived in the nick of time. I have confessed."

"Confessed what?" Campbell cast a bewildered look at the inspector.

"His Lordship says that he hired an assassin to murder Lord Wilmersley."

"What rot! You don't believe him, I hope?"

"He *shall* believe me," cried Cyril. "I alone am responsible for Wilmersley's death. The person who actually fired the shot was nothing but my tool. I will never betray him, never!"

"Honour among murderers, I see! Really, Cyril, you are too ridiculous," exclaimed Campbell.

Suddenly he caught sight of Amy, cowering in the shadow of the curtain.

"Who is this lady?" he asked.

"My wife! Look after her. Look after everything." Cyril gave Guy a look in which he tried to convey all that he did not dare to say.

The door again opened.

"Mr. Judson is 'ere, my lord. I told him you were engaged, but he says he would like to speak to you most particular."

"I don't want to see him," began Cyril.

"Don't be a greater fool than you can help," exclaimed Campbell. "How do you know that he has not some important news?"

"But—" objected Cyril.

"Good morning, your Lordship. How do you do, Inspector. Mr. Campbell, I believe. Your servant, your Ladyship. I took the liberty of forcing myself upon you at this moment, my lord, because I have just learnt certain facts which——"

"It is too late to report," interposed Cyril hastily. "I have confessed."

The detective smiled indulgently.

"Why, my lord, what is the use of pretending that you had anything to do with the murder? I hurried here to tell you that there is no further need of your sacrificing yourself. I have found out who——"

"Shut up, I say. I did it. It 's none of your business anyhow!" cried Cyril incoherently.

"Don't listen to his Lordship," said Amy. "We all know, of course, that he is perfectly innocent. He is trying to shield some one. But who?" She cast a keen look at Cyril.

"That 's just it," Judson agreed. "And it is partly my fault. I convinced his Lordship that Lord Wilmersley was murdered by his wife. I have come here to tell him that I was mistaken. It is lucky that I discovered the truth in time."

"Thank God!" cried Cyril. "I always knew she was innocent." His relief was so intense that it robbed him of all power of concealment.

Amy's mouth hardened into a straight, inflexible line; her eyes narrowed.

"I suppose that you have some fact to support your extraordinary assertion?" demanded Griggs, unable to hide his vexation at finding that his rival had evidently outwitted him.

"Certainly, but I will say no more till I have his Lordship's permission. He is my employer, you know."

"What difference does that make?" asked Cyril. "I am more anxious than any one to discover the truth."

"Permit me to suggest, my lord, that it would be better if I could first speak to you in private."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Cyril impatiently. "I am tired of this eternal secrecy. Tell us what you have found out."

The detective's brows contracted slightly.

"Very well, only remember, I warned you."

"That 's all right."

"Have you forgotten, my lord, that I told you I always had an idea that those two Frenchmen who were staying at the Red Lion Inn, were somehow implicated in the affair?"

"But what possible motive could they have had for murdering my cousin?" demanded Cyril.

The detective's eyes appeared to wander aimlessly from one of his auditors to another.

"We are waiting. What about those Frenchmen?"

It was Amy who spoke. She moved slowly forward, and leaning her arm on the mantelpiece confronted the four men.

"You wish me to continue?" asked Judson.

"Certainly. Why not?"

The detective inclined his head and again turned towards Cyril.

"Having once discovered their identity, my lord, their motive was quite apparent."

"Well, who are they? Out with it."

"The elder," began Judson, speaking very slowly, "is Monsieur de Brissac. The younger—" he paused.

For a moment Cyril was too stunned to speak. He could do nothing but stare stupidly at the detective. Amy guilty! Amy! It was incredible!

"Stop! Your suspicions are absurd! Do not listen to him, Inspector!" He hardly knew what he was saying. He only realised confusedly that something within him was crying to him to save her.

A wonderful light suddenly transfigured Amy's drawn face.

"Cyril, would you really do this for——"

"Hush!" He tried to silence her.

She turned proudly to the inspector.

"I don't care now who knows the truth. I killed Lord Wilmersley."

"Don't listen to her! Don't you see that she is not accountable for what she is saying?" cried Cyril. He had forgotten everything but that she was a woman—his wife.

"I killed Lord Wilmersley," Amy repeated, as if he had not spoken, "but I did not murder him."

"Does your Ladyship expect us to believe that you happened to call at the castle at half-past ten in the evening, and that during an amicable conversation you accidentally shot Lord Wilmersley?" demanded Griggs.

"No," replied Amy contemptuously, "of course not! I—" She hesitated.

"If your Ladyship had not ulterior purpose in going to Newhaven, why did you disguise yourself as a boy and live there under an assumed name? And who is this Frenchman who posed as your brother?"

Amy threw her head back defiantly. A faint colour swept over her face.

"Monsieur de Brissac was my lover. When we discovered that his Lordship was employing detectives, we went to Newhaven, because we thought that it was the last place where they would be likely to look for us. I disguised myself to throw them off the scent."

"But the description the inspector gave me of the boy did not resemble you in the least," insisted Cyril.

"It was I nevertheless. I merely cut off my hair and dyed it. See!" She snatched the black wig from her head, disclosing a short crop of reddish curls.

"You have yet to explain," resumed the inspector sternly, "what took you to Geralton in the middle of the night. Under the circumstances I should have thought your Ladyship would hardly have cared to visit his Lordship's relations."

Ignoring Griggs, Amy turned to her husband.

"My going there was the purest accident," she began in a dull, monotonous voice, almost as if she were reciting a lesson, but as she proceeded, her excitement increased till finally she became so absorbed in her story that she appeared to forget her hearers completely. "I was horribly restless, so we spent most of our time motoring and often stayed out very late. One night a tire burst. I noticed that we had stopped within a short walk of the castle. As I had never seen it except at a distance, it occurred to me that I would like to have a nearer view of the place. In my boy's clothes I found it fairly easy to climb the low wall which separates the

gardens from the park. Not a light was to be seen, so, as there seemed no danger of my being discovered, I ventured on to the terrace. As I stood there, I heard a faint cry. My first impulse was to retrace my footsteps as quickly as possible, but when I realised that it was a woman who was crying for help, I felt that I must find out what was the matter. Running in the direction from which the sound came, I turned a corner and found myself confronted by a lighted window. The shrieks were now positively blood-curdling and there was no doubt in my mind that some poor creature was being done to death only a few feet away from me. The window was high above my head, but I was determined to reach it. After several unsuccessful attempts I managed to gain a foothold on the uneven surface of the wall and hoist myself on to the window-sill. Luckily the window was partially open, so I was able to slip noiselessly into the room and hide behind the curtain. Peering through the folds, I saw a woman lying on the floor. Her bodice was torn open, exposing her bare back. Over her stood a man who was beating her with a piece of cord which was attached

to the waist of a sort of Eastern dressing-gown he wore.

"'So you thought you would leave me, did you?' he cried over and over again as the lash fell faster and faster. 'Well, you won't! Not till I send you to hell, which I will some day.'

"At last he paused and wiped the perspiration from his brow. He was very fat and his exertions were evidently telling on him.

"'Why should n't I kill you now? I have my pistol within reach of my hand. It is here on my desk. Ah, you did n't know that, did you?' He gave a fiendish laugh.

"The woman shuddered but made no attempt to rise.

"I was slowly recovering from the terror which had at first paralysed me. I realised I must act at once if I meant to save Lady Wilmersley's life. The desk was behind him.

"Dropping on my hands and knees, I crept cautiously toward it. 'Kill you, kill you, that is what I ought to do,' he kept repeating.

"I reached the desk. No pistol was to be seen; yet I knew it was there. As I fumbled

among his papers, my hand touched an ancient steel gauntlet. Some instinct told me that I had found what I sought. But how to open it was the question. Some agonising moments passed before I at last accidentally pressed the spring and a pistol lay in my hand.

"He again raised the cord.

"'Stop!' I cried.

"He swung around and as he caught sight of the pistol levelled at his head, the purple slowly faded from his face.

"Then seemingly reassured at finding that it was only a boy who confronted him, he took a step forward.

"'Who the devil are you? Get out of here!' he cried.

"'Stay where you are or I fire.'

"'What nonsense is this?' he blustered, but I noticed that his knees shook and he made no further effort to move.

"'Climb out of the window. There is a car waiting in the road,' I called to the girl.

"'She shall not go!' he shrieked. The veins stood out on his temples.

"I held him with my eye and saw his coward

soul quiver with fear as I moved deliberately nearer him.

"'Do as I tell you. Run for your life,' I repeated.

"'But you?' gasped Lady Wilmersley.

"'I have the pistol. I am not afraid. I will follow you,' I assured her.

"I knew rather than saw that she picked up a jacket and bag which lay near the window. With a soft thud she dropped into the night. That is the last I saw of her. What became of her I do not know." Amy paused a moment.

"As Lord Wilmersley saw his wife disappear, he gave a cry like a wounded animal and rushed after her. I fired. He staggered back a few steps, then turning he ran into the adjoining room. I heard a splash but did not stop to find out what happened. Almost beside myself with terror, I fled from the castle. If you have any more questions to ask, you had better hurry."

She stopped abruptly, trembling from head to foot, and glanced wildly about her till her eyes rested on her husband. For a long, long moment she regarded him in silence. She seemed

to be gathering herself together for a supreme effort.

All four men watched her in breathless suspense.

With her eyes still fastened on Cyril she fumbled in the bosom of her dress, then her hand shot out, and before any one could prevent her, she jabbed a hypodermic needle deep into her arm.

"What have you done?" cried Cyril, springing forward and wrenching the needle from her.

A beatific smile spread slowly over her face.

"You are—free," she gasped.

She swayed a little and would have fallen if Cyril had not caught her.

"Quick—a doctor," he cried.

"It is too late," she murmured. "Too late! Forgive me, Cyril. I—loved—you—so——"

CHAPTER XXII

CAMPBELL RESIGNS

UNDER a yew tree, overlooking a wide lawn, bordered on the farther side by a bank of flowers, three people are sitting clustered around a tea-table.

One of them is a little old lady, the dearest old lady imaginable. By her side, in a low basket chair, a girl is half sitting, half reclining. Her small figure, clad in a simple black frock, gives the impression of extreme youth, which impression is heightened by the fact that her curly, yellow hair, reaching barely to the nape of her neck, is caught together by a black ribbon like a schoolgirl's. But when one looks more closely into her pale face, one realises somehow that she is a woman and a woman who has suffered—who still suffers.

On the ground facing the younger woman a

red-headed young man in white flannels is squatting tailor-fashion. He is holding out an empty cup to be refilled.

"Not another!" exclaims the little old lady in a horrified tone. "Why, you have had three already!"

"My dear Trevie, let me inform you once and for all that I have abandoned my figure. Why should I persist in the struggle now that Anita refuses to smile on me? When one's heart is broken, one had better make the most of the few pleasures one can still enjoy. So another cup, please."

Anita took no notice of his sally; her eyes were fixed on the distant horizon; she seemed absorbed in her own thoughts.

"By the way," remarked Campbell casually as he sipped his tea, "I spent last Sunday at Geralton." He watched Anita furtively. A faint flutter of the eyelids was the only indication she gave of having heard him, yet Guy was convinced that she was waiting breathlessly for him to continue.

"How is Lord Wilmersley?" asked Miss Trevor with kindly indifference.

"Very well indeed. He is doing a lot to the castle. You would hardly know it—the interior, I mean." Although he had pointedly addressed Anita, she made no comment. It was only after a long silence that she finally spoke.

"And how is Valdriguez?" she inquired.

"Much the same. She plays all day long with the dolls Cyril bought for her. She seems quite happy."

Again they relapsed into silence.

Miss Trevor took up her knitting, which had been lying in her lap, and was soon busy avoiding the pitfalls a heel presents to the unwary.

"I think I will go for a walk," said Anita, rising slowly from her seat. There was a hint of exasperation in her voice which escaped neither of her hearers.

Miss Trevor peered anxiously over her spectacles at the retreating figure.

Campbell's rubicund countenance had grown strangely grave.

"No better?" he asked as soon as Anita was out of earshot.

Miss Trevor shook her head disconsolately.

"Worse, I think. I can't imagine what can

be the matter with her. She seemed at one time to have recovered from her terrible experience. But now, as you can see for yourself, she is absolutely wretched. She takes no interest in anything. She hardly eats enough to keep a bird alive. If she goes on like this much longer, she will fret herself into her grave. Yet whenever I question her, she assures me that she is all right. I really don't know what I ought to do."

"Has it never occurred to you that she may be wondering why Wilmersley has never written to her, nor been to see her?"

"Lord Wilmersley? Why—no. She hardly ever mentions him."

"She never mentions him," corrected Guy. "She inquires after everybody at Geralton except Cyril. Does n't that strike you as very suspicious?"

"Oh, you don't mean that——"

He nodded.

"But she hardly knows him! You told me yourself that she had only seen him three or four times."

"True, but you must remember that they met

under very romantic conditions. And Cyril is the sort of chap who would be likely to appeal to a girl's imagination."

"Lady Wilmersley in love! I can't believe it!" exclaimed Miss Trevor.

"I wish I didn't," muttered Guy under his breath.

She heard him, however, and laid her small, wrinkled hand tenderly on his shoulder.

"My poor boy, I guessed your trouble long ago."

"Don't pity me! It doesn't hurt any longer —not much at least. When one realises a thing is quite hopeless, one somehow ends by adjusting oneself to the inevitable. What I feel for her now is more worship than love. I want above all things that she should be happy, and if Cyril can make her so, I would gladly speed his wooing."

"Do you think he has any thought of her?"

"I am sure he loves her."

"Then why has he given no sign of life all these months?"

"I fancy he is waiting for the year of their mourning to elapse. But I confess that I am

surprised that he has been able to restrain his impatience as long as this. Every day I have expected—By Jove!" cried Campbell, springing to his feet, "there he is now!"

Miss Trevor turned and saw a tall figure emerge from the house.

Being plunged suddenly into the midst of romance, together with the unexpected and dramatic arrival of the hero, was too much for the little lady's composure. Her bag, her knitting, her glasses fell to the ground unheeded as she rose hurriedly to receive Lord Wilmersley.

"So glad to see you! Let me give you a cup of tea, or would you prefer some whiskey and soda?" She was so flustered that she hardly knew what she was saying.

"Thanks, I won't take anything. Hello, Guy! You here? Rather fancied I might run across you."

Cyril's eyes strayed anxiously hither and thither.

"Looking for Anita, are you?" asked Guy.

"I?" Cyril gave a start of guilty surprise. "Yes, I was wondering where she was." His tone was excessively casual.

"Humph!" grunted Campbell contemptuously.

"She has gone for a little walk, but as she never leaves the grounds, she can't be very far off," said Miss Trevor.

"Perhaps—" Cyril hesitated; he was painfully embarrassed.

Guy came to his rescue.

"Come along," he said. "I will show you where you are likely to find her."

"Thanks! I did rather want to see her—ahem, on business!"

"On business? Oh, you old humbug!" jeered Campbell as he sauntered off.

For a moment Cyril glared at Guy's back indignantly; then mumbling an apology to Miss Trevor, he hastened after him.

They had gone only a short distance before they espied a small, black-robed figure coming towards them. Guy stopped short; he glanced at Cyril, but the latter was no longer conscious of his presence. Without a word he turned and hurriedly retraced his footsteps.

"Well, Trevie," he said, "I must be going. Can't loaf forever, worse luck!" His manner was quite ostentatiously cheerful.

Miss Trevor, however, was not deceived by it. "You are a dear, courageous boy," she murmured.

With a flourish of his hat that seemed to repudiate all sympathy, Guy turned on his heel and marched gallantly away.

Meanwhile, in another part of the garden, a very different scene was being enacted.

On catching sight of each other Cyril and Anita had both halted simultaneously. Cyril's heart pounded so violently that he could hardly hear himself think.

"I must be calm," he said to himself. "I must be calm! But how beautiful she is! If I only had a little more time to collect my wits! I know I shall make an ass of myself!"

As these thoughts went racing through his brain, he had been moving almost automatically forward. Already he could distinguish the soft curve of her parted lips and the colour of her dilated eyes.

A sudden panic seized him. He was conscious of a wild desire to fly from her presence; but it was too late. He was face to face with her.

For a moment neither moved, but under the

insistence of his gaze her eyes slowly sank before his. Then, without a word, as one who merely claims his own, he flung his arms around her and crushed her to his heart.

THE END

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